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The Afterlife of Corpses: A Social History of Unburied Dead Bodies in Qing China (1644-1911)

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Abstract of this Dissertation

A Dissertation for Arts & Sciences Graduate Student

by

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This dissertation began with the reading of numerous Qing-dynasty records pertaining to dead bodies that remained on the ground without proper burial. These bodies were not necessarily the victims of extraordinary events such as wars or natural disasters, but the remains of ordinary people whose families failed to arrange a burial site. A wide range of historical materials recorded the presence of these bodies, such as commentaries and critiques on popular burial customs written by the imperial government and literati elites, and Qing popular tales where these bodies were described as man-hunting zombies (*jiangshi* 僵屍). These sources demonstrate unburied dead bodies as highly abnormal and deeply problematic, representing a dysfunctional aspect of popular death custom that proliferated in the Qing, particularly in the Jiangnan area. This dissertation observes how, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these bodies left on the ground provoked an empire-wide discomfort and discussion pertaining to what must be the proper way of disposing of the dead, which further gave rise to civic movements of managing death and burial in several localities in Jiangnan.

The root of the problem was the rapidly changing socioeconomic structure in the Lower Yangzi area during the so-called High Qing period, when the bustling economy of an enormous empire was accompanied by the growing imbalance between population and arable land. The intensifying land competition increasingly deprived the dead of their resting place, as the security of the dead's resting place depended on the security of the family's claim to the burial site. As a result, by the eighteenth century, it became a common practice in Jiangnan to leave dead bodies without permanent burial until a good burial site was finally arranged. Often, these bodies ended up not being able to rest in the final resting place, left unburied permanently and lost. Largely conceived of being "homeless," the victim of popular custom called delayed burial (*tingzang* 停葬), unburied corpses embodied the economic and social marginality.

The Qing response to this problem was two-fold. On the one hand, the Qing government, perceiving unburied dead bodies as an epitome of the decline of family ethics, strove to ideologize this problem and enforce what it perceived as proper burial (*anzang* 安葬) – that is, burying the dead in earth in a timely manner. In particular, the government and local administrators attempted to standardize the neo-Confucian precept of proper burial in local society as part of their efforts to reform local popular customs. On the other hand, in several localities in Jiangnan, the ideology of proper burial developed into a civic activism of what I call public death management that spread under the leadership of local elites and philanthropists (charities and guilds). Public death management refers to the public initiative of managing death and burial that emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries relying on the mobilization of public funds and expansion of death-related services, including public cemeteries and other public facilities – such as coffin homes – that helped people dispose of the body properly.

Public death services offered by public charities and guild organizations both continued and revised the imperial ideology of proper burial. Just like the imperial government, civic actors in Jiangnan did acknowledge unburied dead bodies as a sign of social dysfunction and were committed to fix this problem. Meanwhile, there were certain gaps between the imperial ideological definition of proper burial and what actually occurred in local society. If the former was about bringing the dead back to the framework of ancestor worship – and therefore reviving family ethics – the latter focused more on securing and protecting collective physical spaces for the community's dead. Thus, the civic notion of proper burial developed into a more public sense of responsibility for the welfare of the dead. In late nineteenth-century Shanghai, public cemeteries and coffin homes became an imperative part of urban life to the point that residents of Shanghai fought to protect these facilities against the encroachment of foreign imperial powers. These instances of controversies over public cemeteries, and the Chinese attempts to preserve the collective home for the dead, reveal how public death management creatively transformed the ideology of proper burial into an urban civic-oriented understanding of the relationship between the living and the dead.

INTRODUCTION: No Land for the Dead

In the spring of 2014, the local government of Anqing, located in Anhui province, issued new rules mandating cremation that would take effect on June 1. The new policy stated that, by the end of the year, 50 percent of all people who die must be cremated; by the end of 2015, this would rise to 70 percent, and by the end of 2016, 80 percent. With the announcement of the new policy in mid-April, the local government began to seize coffins that some villagers had been storing at home in preparation for their death. It is reported that there were six suicides in the villages in the area "in the hope that they'd be buried rather than cremated."[1]

If the above report is true, then the six villagers ended their lives in this world in order to have a good afterlife, which is only possible to obtain, according to other villagers, by "sleep[ing] in a room where the wind and the water don't get in, and that's their coffin."[2] In other words, being put in a coffin and buried in land, instead of being cremated, was the best way of ensuring a good afterlife. Resting in a coffin protected from wind and water is an allusion to what constituted an age-old notion of "good burial," as exemplified in a classical phrase, *zang zhe cang ye* ("burying [the dead] means hiding away [the body]" 葬者藏也), a phrase from a two-millennium old classical text.[3] It teaches that the essence of the death ritual is to hide the

[1] Didi Tatlow, "Elderly Suicides Reported After City Announces Phase-out on Burials," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2014. https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/elderly-suicides-reported-after-city-announces-phase-out-on-burials/

[2] Tatlow, "Elderly Suicides."

[3] The passage is from the Tangong section of *Liji* (Book of Rites). Throughout the early modern period, *Liji* was the most authoritative reference to the ancient model of death rites. The entire passage says: "Burying means hiding away; and that hiding (of the body) is from a wish that men should not see it.

body, wrapped by a shroud, placed in a coffin, put in an outer coffin, and finally covered in earth, so that the deceased is not exposed and can rest in peace. For most contemporary Chinese, this phrase would sound anachronistic and even superstitious, considering that for decades cremation has been promoted as a standard mode of disposing of dead bodies in China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP, hereafter) has advocated cremation as part of its combat against "traditional" practices of burying the dead in a graveyard, which the government considered as a waste of land and resources. From an early stage of its rule in China, the CCP claimed that "a large amount of arable land is used for graves, aggravating China's problem of shrinking farmland; in addition, graves scattered in the fields make mechanized farming next to impossible."[4] This viewpoint further constituted the basis of the current policies of promoting cremation. In the proposal of nation-wide burial reform (*binzang gaige* 殡葬改革) issued in 2009, the Ministry of Civil Affairs asserted that cremation must replace earth burial because it would "save the land, protect the environment, reform customs, and reduce people's burden of managing burial." The government further stressed that these measures were imperative given the situation that "people are numerous while land is in short supply [and therefore] there are not abundant resources."[5] Therefore, the individual aspirations of having a good afterlife – by taking up a piece of land – are at odds with the state agenda to promote cremation that would save land

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Hence there are the clothes sufficient for an elegant covering; the coffin all round about the clothes; the shell all round the coffin; and the earth all round about the shell. And shall we farther raise a mound over the grave and plant it with trees?" *Li Chi, Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institution* (trans. James Legge) (New York: University Books, 1967), 155-156.

[4] Martin Whyte, "Death in the People's Republic of China," in *Death Rituals in Late Imperial and Modern China*, eds. James Watson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 294.

[5] "The Guiding Opinion on the Scientific Development of Funeral and Burial Matters in order to Enhance Funeral and Burial Reforms" (*guanyu jinyibu shenhua binzang gaige zujin binzang shiye kexue fazhande zhidao yijian*). http://xxgk.mca.gov.cn:8081/new_gips/contentSearch?id=32483.

and resources and further benefit the wealth of the nation. The living have to compete with the dead over land, so to speak.

The above instance is but one example of what is frequently happening to a countless number of dead bodies in contemporary China. The aggressive removal of the dead from their resting place is an on-going process. In rural regions of Jiangxi, the "zero burial" policy implemented in 2018 resulted in the violent seizure and destruction of coffins residents have spent their lives saving up to buy, which stirred up anger and resentment among locals.[6] In Hong Kong, one of the world's most densely populated metropolises, the government has been pushing residents to abandon the tradition of burying the deceased in a grave or in an urn and instead encouraged them to spread the ashes in gardens or at sea in order to conserve living space, which many people take as an "insult [to the deceased] in the afterlife."[7] The contemporary tensions over the issue of burial largely hinge on the anxiety that the bodily sanctity of the dead is marginalized by the logic of economic growth, development, and profits. In a recent edited digital volume, *The Chinese Deathscape*, Thomas Mullaney delineated the relocation of graves and dead bodies under the government-led campaign, "digging graves for farmland," which has been spreading throughout China during the recent decades. According to Mullaney, the constant migration of dead bodies in contemporary China is a response to the population crisis. With the "great purging of the dead," Mullaney asserts, "only the bare minimum of territorial resources

[6] Mimi Lau, "Coffins Smashed, Seized, Exhumed in China as Province Bans Burials to Save Land," *South China Morning Post,* July 31, 2018. https://scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2157531/co!ns-smashed-seized-exhumed-china-province-bans-burials-save

[7] Javier Hernández, "Hong Kong's Drive for 'Green Burials' Clashes With Tradition," *The New York Times*, Oct 22, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/23/world/asia/hong-kongs-drive-for-green-burials-clashes-with-tradition.html

would be afforded to the dead."[8] Being deprived of the resting place, alienated from land for the benefit of the living, was in a sense the modern fate of the dead.

* * *

The reform of the "traditional" mode of burial by depriving the dead of their resting place occurred in a way that fundamentally problematized and altered the relationship between the dead and the land, a relationship that constituted the basis of burial practices in the early modern period. Cremation was officially an illegal means of disposing of the dead for about a millennium, up to a century ago. The living were obliged to find a suitable resting place properly arranged in land for the deceased. Of course, this does not mean that cremation never happened in China during this period, but there was a clear notion of what the proper method of disposing of the dead was, which was earth burial. This ideal of proper burial was more an ideological imperative than a reality, for people resorted to numerous different means of disposing of bodies depending on circumstances. Still, during the early modern period, there appears to have been a general understanding that the dead can rest in peace only by being buried in soil – if not a whole body in a coffin, then bones in an urn. Even cremated bodies were buried in a grave.

Seen from this perspective, it is surprising that the phenomenon of numerous dead bodies that remained unburied above ground consistently appears in the records of the Qing. These bodies were not just the bodies of beggars, homeless, victims of war or natural disaster, or people who simply met an unfortunate death and were abandoned on the street. Rather, it was quite

[8] Thomas Mullaney, "No Room for the Dead: On Grave Relocation in Contemporary China," in *The Chinese Deathscape*, ed. Thomas Mullaney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019). https://chinesedeathscape.supdigital.org/read/no-room-for-the-dead

common to find bodies put in a coffin but left without interment, covered only by dry grass, mat, thin earth, or just half buried.

Image 1. A coffin on the ground, covered by a mat[9]

These bodies appeared in various genres of writings that include popular tales, comments on popular customs, legal documents, government edicts, ethnographies, and late nineteenth-century newspapers. Widely termed "delayed burial" (*tingzang* 停葬) or "temporary disposal" (*fucuo* 浮厝), throughout the Qing period, it was an extremely widespread practice to dispose of dead bodies in a temporary space without permanent burial until the final resting place could be arranged. Qing-era sources normally discussed these practices as unorthodox or illicit ways of disposing of the dead that were pervasive in several parts of China. While it is difficult to estimate the overall number of these bodies, it appears that these bodies were numerous enough

[9] Photographed in Shanghai around 1920-1930, this photo is titled "A temporary grave, by a concrete bridge." https://www.hpcbristol.net/visual/ar04-053

to make many Qing authors feel anxious and uncomfortable. Taken together, the ubiquitous presence of these bodies was taken by Qing commenters as a significant mark of debased social practices and popular customs with regard to death and burial. This dissertation contends that unburied dead bodies provide a unique opportunity to observe how the meanings of death and burial were constituted and changed in the social and cultural milieu of early modern China. In particular, the perception of these bodies as emblems of social dysfunction prompted the empire-wide engagement with the popular practices of death and burial, bringing death into the discussion of population, land, social resources, and imperial governance.

While scholars have widely recognized the presence of these bodies in the early modern period, these bodies have not been fully integrated into Qing social history. In previous research, scholars have primarily examined death as a matter of ritual practices and ideology. The most authoritative reference by far is *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, an edited volume that provides interdisciplinary investigations into death-related cultures and practices. In particular, this volume is well-known for the debate between the renowned anthropologist James Watson and the eminent historian Evelyn Rawski over the standardization of death rituals in China. Here, both scholars see delayed burial as an exception to the standard sequence of death rituals, albeit very widespread during the early modern period, especially in North China.[10] In one chapter of this influential edited volume, Susan Naquin points out that it was in fact not uncommon that bodies stayed above ground for quite a while until the family arranged interment.[11] James Watson picked up the historians' argument to contrast delayed burial to the

[10] James Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance," in *Death Rituals in Late Imperial and Early Modern China*, 3-19; Evelyn Rawski, "A Historian's Approach to Chinese Death Ritual," in *Death Rituals in Late Imperial and Early Modern China*, 20-35.

[11] Susan Naquin, "Funerals in North China: Uniformity and Variation," in *Death Rituals in Late Imperial and Early Modern China*, 42.

practice of secondary burial, which was widespread in South China, and further to put forth a theory that the funerary rites (up to the expulsion of the body) were standardized while the rites of disposal (after the expulsion of the body) varied according to local customs.[12] For him, the gist of Chinese death rituals was "a high degree of variation within an overarching structure of unity," and delayed burial was an example of the tolerated variation of post-expulsion rites.[13]

Another set of scholarship that discusses unburied – or, exposed – dead bodies includes a few recent publications pertaining to the social history of death in modern China. This scholarship particularly sheds lights on how the management of death and burial was impacted by the new context of nation-building and urbanization in the twentieth century. Christian Henriot's *Scythe and the City* traces how the urbanization of Shanghai entailed the enhancement of regulations of dead bodies – including those unclaimed, unburied, and abandoned – in the city through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Daniel Asen observes how the regulation of death institutionalized in Republican Beijing by tracing the rise of a rudimentary structure of bureaucratizing the regulation of death and burial, such as the system of death reporting and controlling the transit of bodies in urban space.[14] In these narratives, unburied dead bodies tend to epitomize the distinct early modern model of regulation – or, the lack of regulation – of death and burial that came to be seen as incompatible with the modern logic of state governance and urban administration. In other words, unburied dead bodies inherently stand at the opposite side of urbanization, regulation, and modernity. Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke's chapter on infant burial in the Qing further brings to light how the burial custom of exposing infant bodies was captured by

[12] Secondary burial refers to the practice of disposing of a body temporarily until it decomposes, then collecting bones and putting those in an urn to bury it in a grave.

[13] Watson, "The Structure," 16.

[14] Christian Henriot, *Scythe and the City: A Social History of Death in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Daniel Asen, *Death in Beijing: Murder and Forensic Science in Republican China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Western observers as a horrifying culture of infanticide that characterized the barbaric image of China.[15]

This dissertation asserts that unburied dead bodies were far from a static presence in the early modern period; rather, these bodies did bother the Qing state and society to the point where the imperial government no longer tolerated it, and further pushed the state and society to respond. The attempts to regulate death and burial did not wait until the advent of Western influence and modern state structure. By examining the Qing response to unburied dead bodies, I argue that managing death and burial became a matter of imperial governance and statecraft throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The main thread of observation follows the process in which unburied dead bodies came to be seen as being at odds with certain ways of sending off the dead that were deemed ideal and proper in light of dominant intellectual and philosophical currents of the eighteenth century. This perception further led to social movements of regulating death and managing dead bodies by mobilizing civic resources. This process was particularly salient in the area commonly referred to as the Lower Yangzi (Jiangnan 江南), the most commercialized and urbanized part of the Qing located at the southeastern edge of the empire. By the end of the Qing, in several localities in Jiangnan, the public management of death became a norm as well as a social practice that significantly shaped people's expectations of their afterlife.

[15] Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, "Cradle to Grave: Baby Towers and the Politics of Infant Burial in Qing China," *The Chinese Deathscape,* https://chinesedeathscape.supdigital.org/read/cradle-to-grave. Also see Michelle King, *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 84-92.

In the following four chapters, I present and analyze texts produced by various constituents of the Qing who enthusiastically sought to reform, govern, and order society by regulating death and burial.

The Qing ideology of proper burial inherited the precepts of ritual propriety created by neo-Confucians in the Song (960-1279). Neo-Confucians professed the importance of proper rituals in dealing with funeral and burial, putting forth the proper performance of death rituals as a supreme mark of filial piety. In doing so, they made timely interment of dead bodies deep in the earth – as opposed to above-ground disposal and cremation – as one of the chief components of proper burial. They claimed that properly burying the dead in the earth was indispensable for building a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead. By the eighteenth century, this notion of proper burial was incorporated into the discourse of Qing imperial governance in two ways: first, Qing law adhered to the principle of proper burial by prohibiting cremation and delayed burial; second, proper burial was adopted by the statecraft approach to local governance, in which spreading proper burial was at the vanguard of reforming popular customs and reinvigorating social ethics and morality.

The stories of unburied dead bodies reveal how burdensome it was for many people to conform to this ideological imperative. Proper burial was not only a ritual matter but also an economic one. In China, arranging a burial site did not require any religious institutional affiliations – such as church graveyards in medieval and early modern Europe or temple cemeteries in early modern Japan – nor did the imperial state control the place of interment. [16] A

[16] Julia Barrow, "Urban Cemetery Location in the High Middle Ages," in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and Death, 100-1600*, ed. Steven Bassett (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1992), 78-100; Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Andrew Bernstein, *Modern Passings: Death Rites, Politics, and Social Change in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2006).

grave existed as a family property, and therefore arranging and maintaining a grave was highly contingent on the financial condition or property management of the family. Therefore, ideally, the living were obliged to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the dead by maintaining the dead's property, which required substantial financial investment.

In the Qing, particularly during the eighteenth century, there was a growing concern about frequent disturbances of the dead's resting place driven by economic pressure and land shortage. Scholars have mostly relied on the records of grave desecration to examine this issue. One of the common observations made in this scholarship is that these grave-related crimes were a response to the crucial change of material conditions of the mid Qing, namely, the demographic pressure, market economy, and the intensifying land competition.[17] A grave was not simply a sacred resting place of the deceased but a valuable economic resource of the living family. In particular, Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke aptly pointed out that being buried in a resting place did not necessarily mean that the dead rested in peace permanently. Rather, "corpses did not just exist, but were *made* through the investment of considerable labor and care by interested parties."[18] In other words, dead bodies – and the places where the bodies were buried – required constant protection and management by surviving family members.

The growing visibility of unburied dead bodies in the eighteenth century was another sign that demonstrated the deterioration of the dead's sanctity caused by material conditions. State officials and elite writers who were concerned about popular death customs interpreted the

[17] Thomas Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes over Property Rights in Eighteenth Century China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75, 142, 225; Weiting Guo, "Social Practice and Judicial Politics in "Grave Destruction" Cases in Qing Taiwan, 1683–1895," in *Chinese Law: Knowledge, Practice, and Transformation, 1530s to 1950s*, eds. Li Chen and Madeleine Zelin (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 84-123; Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, "Afterlives of the Dead: Uncovering Graves and Mishandling Corpses in Nineteenth-Century China," *Frontier History of China* 11 (2016): 1-20.

[18] Snyder-Reinke, "Afterlives of the Dead," 19.

problem of unburied dead bodies in light of intensifying socioeconomic pressure. In the eyes of these critiques, bodies were left unburied because of the difficulties of arranging a suitable burial site: people postponed burial either because they did not have means to acquire land to serve as a burial site (poverty) or because they would not want to bury the deceased in "any" kind of land (aspiration for a good burial site). Implicit in this interpretation is that people of different economic and social standing had different problems to deal with when arranging burial. What was more important in this discourse, however, was the moral implications of this unequal access to land. The adherents of proper burial monolithically saw unburial as a moral deficit, i.e., the failure to fulfill the responsibility to the deceased family member, induced by the material conditions of an individual family. Conceivably, people who practiced delayed burial due to poverty did not feel guilty for leaving the dead unburied, whereas people who did so due to an aspiration for a better burial site believed that they were doing a good moral deed for the dead. In other words, land problems provided a convenient excuse to both the rich and the poor for not adhering to the neo-Confucian precept of proper burial. Therefore, the eighteenth-century criticism of unburial was tied to the broader anxiety of socioeconomic pressure and its impact on the family-based moral system. Unburied bead bodies were homeless, so to speak. These bodies were deprived of their own postmortem property because the family failed to fulfill their moral – and financial – responsibility to them.

Since the problem of unburial was closely intertwined with the problem of land competition, the remedy – or, the "reform" of popular burial custom – required a statecraft approach that could improve the material conditions of burial. It occurred by mobilizing public resources to expand communal burial sites called public cemeteries (*yizhong* 義塚) on behalf of families that were not capable of arranging private graves. The basic logic was that, since the

root of the problem lay in the difficulties that kept individual families from finding suitable burial sites, the solution was to provide a public burial space free of charge. The notion of the communal burial site was not an invention of the Qing, but the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries observed vigorous initiatives of establishing and expanding public cemeteries that were used to provide burial to exposed dead bodies. The outcome was the rise of a new form of civic activism of arranging and protecting communal spaces for the dead, mostly prevalent in the Jiangnan area by the turn of the nineteenth century.

The expansion of public cemeteries occurred hand in hand with the expansion of broader public death management, that is, the public regime of managing death and burial led by the initiatives of civic institutions such as charities and guilds. These were organizations run by locally oriented elite managers who were very active in the area of community affairs. These people frequently worked in cooperation with the local government, but they were mostly responsible for financing and managing public works. They provided a wide range of death-related services, such as providing free coffins, supporting funeral and burial fees, and running charitable burial programs. Public death management was a systematic and institutionalized approach to managing death and burial as part of the community services provided by these non-state actors.

The gist of public cemeteries was to arrange a communal property on behalf of the community members who could not secure a property for the dead. It was a "public" property in nature: it was established and maintained relying on public funds (acquired either through government subsidies or through local endowments); it was exempt from taxation, meaning that the site was supposed to serve the public good; it received the body of anyone who died without his or her own resting place; it was a conspicuous public space where the dead were collectively

reincorporated into the local social norm. Having this property in a community – and having the deceased buried in this property on a regular basis – meant that it became a distinct space arranged by collective efforts for the deceased community members. It expanded the notion of proper burial to a more collective sense of responsibility. Therefore, public actors such as charities and guilds were the alterative managers of the collective properties for the dead.

The impact of this public approach to the management of death and burial was far-reaching. In Jiangnan, once the system of running communal burial sites became rooted in several localities in the early nineteenth century, the same mechanism further dictated the way public death management expanded and developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in the period when several Jiangnan communities experienced crucial social and demographic changes, namely, disruptions by the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), the Opium war (1839-1842), the arrival of the West, and intensifying urbanization. Shanghai provides a good example that shows how the urban transformation of the city took place by embracing and further developing the collective space for the dead. The opening of Shanghai as a treaty port city upon the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 entailed a major transformation of the city's demography, attracting a huge number of migrant workers who did not have a familial attachment in Shanghai and thus had a potentially vulnerable afterlife. Therefore, the evolution of Shanghai into a treaty port city called for the unprecedented proliferation of public death-related services, particularly collective spaces for deceased urban populations including public cemeteries and coffin homes (public facilities for disposing of coffins without interment). Therefore, the urbanization of Shanghai in the latter half of the nineteenth century did not occur by excluding dead bodies from the living's space; rather, charities and guilds embraced the need for postmortem welfare as a central part of their public agenda. Coffin homes and public cemeteries marked a central part of the rapidly changing

urban landscape, serving a significant portion of the urban population that aspired to have a good afterlife. In other words, arranging proper spaces for the dead within the community was an integral part of urbanization in Shanghai. Because of this centrality of death-related services and facilities in city-making, these spaces for the dead were easily incorporated into urban politics, particularly those involving the Western imperial powers present in Shanghai. Occasions of conflict and tension over the urban collective space for the dead highlight how the people of Shanghai ascribed values to these spaces: these were the properties allocated for the deceased community members that were reserved for their potential proper burial, a legitimate component of the urban property regime.

Overall, this dissertation delineates the process in which the notion of proper burial emerged, expanded, and materialized in the form of public death management in Jiangnan throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It reveals significant interplays between death ethics, state and social actors, and public resources for the purpose of providing decent burial to a growing number of homeless dead population. The story of unburied dead bodies and of the living's efforts to manage these bodies examined in this dissertation extends the discussion of mid-Qing demographic problems and state-society relations in a way that illustrates how the socioeconomic transformations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries altered the experience of death and burial.

As well known, the eighteenth century witnessed an explosive population growth. According to Ping-ti Ho, an authoritative scholar of early modern Chinese demography, the population of China more than doubled during the eighteenth century from 150,000,000 around

1700 to 313,000,000 in 1794.[19] This population explosion in the eighteenth century, however, was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in economic productivity, for "the basic population-land relation in the country as a whole remained little changed."[20] This led Hong Liangji, a contemporary intellectual, to suggest a kind of Malthusian crisis in his famous essay on the population problem of the Qing, estimating that "over the past century the empire's population had increased ten to twenty times, while the amount of available farmland has only doubled, or, at the most, increased three to five times."[21]

The increase of population without the equivalent expansion of cultivatable land was partially responsible for the increase of unrooted population that had to seek means of subsistence from other than farming. The so-called unmarried rogue males (*guang gun* 光棍) without a job, family, and settled place of living was increasingly seen as a source of instabilities and disturbances in cities and villages in Jiangnan.[22] The overpopulation of southern provinces in Fujian and Guangdong pushed numerous poverty-stricken people to migrate to the highlands south of the Yangzi River and live a life highly vulnerable to rootlessness, violence, and crime.[23]

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[19] Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 1368-1953 (MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 278. These figures are even more astonishing if we look at these in light of the demographic shift during the last two millennia. James Lee and Wang Feng, estimated that, while the population of China grew only threefold from the first century A.D. to 1750 (from 75 million to 225 million), between 1750 and 1950 the population increased by some 150 percent from 225 million to 555 million. See James Lee and Wang Feng, "Malthusian Models and Chinese Realities: The Chinese Demographic System 1700-2000," *Population and Demographic Review* 25 (1999): 50.

[20] Ho, *Studies on the Population of China,* 278.

[21] William Rowe, "Introduction: The Significance of the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition in Qing China," *Late Imperial China* 32 (2011): 75.

[22] Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 105-118; Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 12-15.

[23] Stephen Averill, "The Shed People and the Opening of the Yangzi Highlands," *Modern China* 9 (1983): 84-126; Anne Osborne, "The Local Politics of Land Reclamation in the Lower Yangzi Highlands," *Late Imperial China* 15 (1994): 1-46.

The Qing government in the eighteenth century was wary of these problems and did strive to improve the institutional basis required for the subsistence of the general population. A good example is the development of the government granary system, which played a crucial role in compensating poor harvests and thus saving the population from famines and epidemics.[24] Lillian Li highlights that the active government investments in river conservancy and grain transport in the eighteenth century "allowed the population to expand and live more securely."[25] The bureaucratic expansion and rationalization of the eighteenth century, however, had limitations, as Li summarizes: "state activism may have helped to avert major mortality crises, but it did not go beyond to eliminate hunger or a marginal existence. So it was possible for the increasingly large population [in North China] to survive many natural and agricultural crises, but not to improve their standard of living and reduce their vulnerability."[26] In other words, although people did not starve to death, an increasing number of people was driven to the margins of life because of ever-increasing demographic pressure.

The Qing government's struggle to handle the demographic crisis of the eighteenth century is in stark contrast to the gradual retreat of the state from local administrative matters in the nineteenth century, or, "the devolution of political control from the central imperial administration into the hands of extra-bureaucratic local elites."[27] Scholars who pioneered the

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[24] Pierre-Étienne Will and R. Bin Wong, *Nourish the People: The State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650-1850* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 497.

[25] Li went on to claim that "for the most part large-scale Malthusian catastrophes were avoided because of the generally favorable economic conditions and state interventionism." Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 9, 381.

[26] Li, *Fighting Famine*, 382.

[27] Rowe, "Introduction," 77. For the expansion of the Qing bureaucracy in the eighteenth century, see Madeleine Zelin, *The Magistrate's Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth-Century Ch'ing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Beatrice Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Peter

studies of Qing state-society relations have contended that local public activism emerged in the Jiangnan area during the latter half of the nineteenth century in order to deal with the mid-century crises. In particular, the rise of local public activism during this period indicated that the state bureaucracy no longer functioned in local society, and thus, the state retreated from local governance and administration.[28] Recently, scholars have attempted to revise this state-retreat thesis by emphasizing multifaceted efforts of reforming bureaucracy at the turn of the nineteenth century, i.e., the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition.[29] According to this scholarship, the state retreat was a deliberate strategic move – or, "pragmatic retreat" – in order to downsize the state bureaucracy in a way that could "restore the balance between state and societal managerial responsibilities." This, in effect, delayed the state breakdown "at least for a few decades, perhaps until the Daoguang depression and the Opium War presented wholly new kinds of threats."[30] Therefore, previous scholarship has stressed how the demographic pressure and population problems that culminate in the eighteenth century pushed the Qing empire to adjust the system of governance, which was further instrumental in making the Qing survive and function for another century.

Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Will and Wong, *Nourish the People.* For the decline of the Qing in the nineteenth century, see Susan Mann Jones and Philip Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," in *The Cambridge History of China,* vol.10, pt.1, eds. Daniel Twichett and John Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 108-13; Elizabeth Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

[28] Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[29] Rowe, "Introduction," 74-88; Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Daniel McMahon, *Rethinking the Decline of China's Qing Dynasty: Imperial Activism and Borderland Management at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Randall Dodgen, *Controlling the Dragon: Confucian Engineers and the Yellow River in Late imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Seunghyun Han*, After the Prosperous Age: State and Elites in Early Nineteenth-Century Suzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[30] Rowe, "Introduction," 84, 77.

This dissertation situates the burial problem as one of the components of these efforts to find ways to make the Qing empire continue to function when the stability of the empire was undermined by various socioeconomic challenges. Unburied dead bodies were at the heart of the Qing anxiety about "no land for the dead," that is, the crises of the dead were in fact the crises of the empire pertaining to the weakening of family-based system of managing death and burial. These bodies epitomized displaced individuals who needed a social safety net to rest in peace. They were mostly ordinary people, who may have been rich or poor, but who did not deserve abandonment in the afterlife. Their bodies left above ground demonstrated more than the misfortune of an individual; they exemplified the failure of family and of society. This anxiety found a solution from enlarging communal burial sites arranged collectively and publicly. Charities and guilds were the alternative caretakers of these bodies, preventing them from being wandering ghosts and helping them return back to the family. The expansion of public death management in nineteenth-century Jiangnan reveals that there emerged a society-wide agreement that the deceased need a proper place to rest. If the family could not do it, then other social actors had to be responsible for it.

CHAPTER 1. *Jiangshi*, the Homeless Dead

The Fear of Unburied Dead Bodies

I. Introduction: Zombies and Qing Storytelling

In the early summer of 1876, a man living in a town near Shanghai contracted an illness. The symptoms appeared to be caused by the curse of the dead. The man came to believe that the troubles he experienced had to do with his wife, who had died eight years previously. The family, too, believed that the problems were related to the deceased wife. They gathered the villagers to inspect the corpse. The crowd marched to find the coffin. When they took the lid off, they saw the corpse lying down inside the coffin without any sign of decay. The face had not lost its color, and the fingernails had grown several inches. Her clothes remained fresh as well. What they had discovered was a *jiangshi* 僵屍, a life-like corpse.[1]

The above vignette was published in *Shenbao* 申報, one of the earliest "modern" newspapers circulated in the area around Shanghai. Although the story appears to be at odds with our conventional assumption of what the modern media normally reports, strange tales like the above regularly appeared in the headlines of *Shenbao* throughout the late nineteenth century.[2] The family found the source of misfortune from the deceased – or, a corpse, more precisely – who had long been dead. This suspicion of the dead's curse was further confirmed by the strange

[1] May 25, 1876, *Shenbao*.

[2] Rania Huntington, "The Weird in the Newspaper," in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Patrick Hanan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 341-96.

body that had seemed "alive." Not very surprisingly, the reporter commented how strange this event was, for this "living corpse" went against the natural cosmic law, that is, "a person's soul, *qi* 氣, and name can exist in the universe while the body, flesh, and blood cannot but decay inside a coffin." The only way for the reporter to make sense of this strange body was that a "vicious *qi*" possessed the corpse and thereby brought a catastrophe to the family. In other words, the anomalous corpse was the locus of and the testimony to the evil force that had been lurking in the realm of the living.

This kind of narrative originated from the tales of the living dead that proliferated throughout the Qing period, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The strange body that remains somehow alive long after death resembles the zombie that we frequently see in Western popular culture. Just like modern-day zombies, these dead bodies were conventionally depicted as the alien Other that posed a great threat to the living. Normally called *jiangshi*, meaning "stiff corpse," and widely known as the Chinese zombie, these corpses have been familiar to modern audiences as well through various cultural productions including films and games.[3] Seen in this light, then, the above newspaper report may be another example of how popular media of the late Qing appropriated the conventional trope of the demonic dead that had already been part of the Chinese culture of storytelling.

[3] For the zombie trope produced in Hong Kong films during the 1980s, see Ho Ng, "Abracadaver: Cross-Cultural Influences in Hong Kong Vampire Movies," in *Phantoms of Hong Kong Cinema*, ed. C. T. Li (Hong Kong: HKIFF/Urban Council, 1989), 29-35. It is also fruitful to compare the Chinese zombie trope with those created in other historical and cultural contexts, such as the zombie in Haiti. See Gyllian Phillips, "White Zombie and the Creole: William Seabrook's The Magic Island and American Imperialism in Haiti," in *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture*, eds. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011), 27-40. Changhyun An also produced a comparative study of the Western zombie and the Chinese *jiangshi*. See Changhyun An, "Sala-itnuen Shichea Zombi-wa Kangsi Character Bigyo Yeongu," *East Asia Cultural Studies* 68 (2017): 187-212.

Notwithstanding its popularity, however, little is known about in what historical contexts such a dreadful character was created, or what these popularized corpses reveal about the society out of which these were born. This chapter discusses *jiangshi* as a way to tackle how various Qing constituents understood the ominous power of dead bodies. The chapter first analyzes central features of *jiangshi* as they appear in eighteenth-century zombie tales. It then considers *jiangshi* as a way to understand the anxiety over the social displacement of the dead. Finally, the chapter turns from stories to reality as it explores, through legal cases, instances in which villagers in North China destroyed corpses in hopes of alleviating the misery that certain kinds of corpses were believed to inflict on their communities.

The Qing tales of the undead, this chapter contends, convey quite a monolithic and clear message: the dead, having been put in unnatural physical conditions, transform into a monstrous being and bring deadly impacts to the living. The unnatural conditions that usually produce zombie-like corpses is the lack of proper burial. Being unable to reside in the resting place, the dead linger on in the world of the living in the form of a predator. And this is how we could read the opening vignette differently. Anxious villagers located the wife's "coffin" – and not a grave – and opened it to confirm the body. What this implies is that the coffin had been left unburied for eight years. Therefore, the sickness of the husband was a curse from the embittered wife, a retribution for the cruelty he inflicted on her – that is, not providing proper burial for eight years after her death. Similarly, in other tales produced in the eighteenth century, corpses would walk out of coffins left in a house, in a temple, on a field, or in the street. In other words, these are the displaced corpses. As discussed in detail in the following sections of this chapter, already by the end of the eighteenth century, zombies emerging from unburied coffins became a distinct trope in Qing popular tales that depicted the mutual hostility between the living and the dead.

This chapter tackles this particular sense of anxiety toward the changing relationship between the living and the dead as depicted by eighteenth-century writers of zombie narratives. The popularization of demonized dead bodies in Qing popular narratives indicates the growing interest in the dead's intrusion in a distinctly corporeal form. In the literary world, the zombie's attack was a new kind of threat caused by the blurring physical boundaries between the living and the dead. This, I argue, further reflects a peculiar sense of disorder that was increasingly visible to several eighteenth-century story writers, i.e., the widespread custom of leaving coffins without permanent burial. The dead turned into zombies because they were not properly sent off, disposed of, and commemorated, and thus their bodies would permanently linger on in the world of the living. Their physical displacement indicated social marginality, the dead being alienated from the family or other relationships. Unable to exist as a meaningful social being in the afterlife, the dead would transform into an intrusive Other and permanently roam around at the fringes of the living's world.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society, the fear of un-dying corpses deeply penetrated into each corner of the Qing empire, bringing together various social groups through the discourse of strange dead bodies. Most of the literary accounts came from a genre called *zhiguai* 志怪 (strange accounts) and *biji* 筆記 (jottings), the collection of random – often supernatural – tales writers collected from miscellaneous sources, including rumors, legends, and hearsay. In these written tales, writers-collectors – themselves being literate elites – adopted, reconstructed, and commented on the experience of encountering zombies told by people in the lower rung of the society, such as itinerant students, laborers, travelers, and lower-level government functionaries. Thus, in the stories, the zombie attack was recreated as a strange but plausible event one might experience in an unfamiliar environment. This experience, however,

was not merely a literary creation. The fear of encountering zombies, encapsulated in the popular phrase *jiangshi weisui* 僵屍為祟 (a zombie causes disaster), appeared in an emperor's edict and imperial criminal reports in the nineteenth century, where groups of local peasants in North China were prosecuted and punished for destroying graves and mutilating corpses during periods of drought and famine. These real-life events reveal how the fear of anomalous corpses translated into actual responses in the peasant community, in which the zombie-like corpses were interpreted as a source of collective suffering and catastrophe.

II. The Genesis of the Living Corpse: Bodies That Look "As If Alive"

The story of the dead had been one of the salient themes in the long tradition of story-telling and literature in China. While the ghost story appeared as early as the eastern Zhou period (770-256 BCE), it was during the Six Dynasties (222-589) and the Tang periods (618-907) that the tales of the dead greatly flourished through the literary genre called *zhiguai*.[4] This genre of writing, normally referred to as "strange accounts," proliferated again in the eighteenth century, as numerous writers – in most cases, male literati – recorded and published short tales in private ghost-story collections or in *biji*. These accounts consisted of short narratives that depicted events pertaining to "supernatural or supranormal phenomena."[5] These stories were presumably compiled via casual conversations, hearsay, legends, and rumors that compilers collected while traveling. Due to the strong supernatural element that dictated the theme of these stories, scholars have debated whether these stories were fictional or not. Scholars do agree, though, that

[4] Mu-chou Poo, "Ghost literature: Exorcistic ritual texts or daily entertainment?" *Asia Major* 13 (2000): 45.

[5] Karl Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from Third to the Tenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 1.

supernaturalism was an integral part of how the author made sense of the society he was recording.[6]

The fact that numerous tales of the dead appeared in strange accounts implies that encountering the dead was primarily interpreted as a strange event. There were several different themes in which the dead played a prominent role, the most outstanding ones being the dead's retribution, the ghost romance – or, "necromantic communion"– and the return-from-death narratives.[7] These themes commonly depict the moments in which the living and the dead come into contact across the boundary between this life and the underworld. In these narratives, the living and the dead virtually coexist in the contiguous cosmic realm. As for this, Robert Campany claimed that "the living and the dead formed a single moral community." That is, "although they [the dead] are ontologically liminal beings normally removed from the realm of the living… they are not morally liminal, not outside the network of obligation."[8] In other words, in the world of the strange tales, both the living and the dead owed a certain part of their existence to each other.

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[6] Karl Kao argues that the records of the supernatural in the medieval period were produced because of their "testimonial value." In other words, recoding strange events and figures would primarily mean that the writer subscribes to the belief that the world of the supernatural really exists. Leo Chan also emphasizes that underlying the production of several strange tales produced in the eighteenth century was "a belief that the supernatural realm of ghost, deities, and other spirits did indeed exist," in which recording the supernatural events and occurrences functioned like the "factual analysis from witnesses of the strange." Karl Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, 3; Leo Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and the Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 6.

[7] Robert Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 377-84; Robert Campany, "Return-from-death-narrative in early medieval China," *Journal of Chinese religions* 18 (1990): 91-125; Judith Boltz, "Not by the seal of office alone: New weapons in battles with the supernatural," in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia Ebrey (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 241-306; Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghost and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

[8] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 378, 382.

One key element of the tales of the dead is that it is the spirit, not the body, that normally represents the dead person. It is the ghost of the dead that appears to the living and communicates with them; likewise, it is the spirit of the person that travels to the underworld, while the body remains inanimate. This division of the spirit and the body is possible because of the Chinese conceptualization of two different components of the human soul, *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 – the spiritual soul and the corporeal soul – which correspond to *yang* 陽 and *yin* 陰 and separate from each other at the moment of death.[9] In ghost tales, the body of the dead plays only a supplementary role that makes sense of the supernatural occurrence. For instance, in the tales of intruding into a grave, it is normally the "ghostly figure" that appears to the invader to complain about the discomfort done to its body laid in a grave.[10] In well-known ghost romances such as *Mudanting* or *Qiannü lihun*, the boundary between the spirit and the body is radically blurred to the point that the spirit freely separates from the body and acts as a human being, even giving birth to a child.[11] Judith Zeitlin further explored this seemingly oxymoronic relationship between the spirit and the body utilizing several ghost romance tales of the seventeenth century. Here, the centrality of ghost over corpse continues to dictate the stories. According to Zeitlin, it is the eloquent body of the female ghost, which is different from the cadaver, that functions as the "mediating figure of the revenant" onto which male desire is usually projected. The ghost's body and corpse existed almost like separate entities, for ghost and corpse "cannot ordinarily coexist

[9] Ying-shih Yü, "O Soul, come back! Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul. and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 363-395. *Yang* and *yin* refer to two opposite cosmic forces that constitute the natural world. *Yang* embodies a bright, warm, and positive nature, while *yin* stands for dark, cold, and negative one.

[10] Company, *Strange Writing*, 379-81.

[11] For the medieval version of the tale produced by Qian Xuanyu, see Karl Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, 184-6. This motif was later adopted by the late-Ming writer, Tang Xuanzu, in his opera*, The Peony Pavilion*. see Cyril Birch's preface to his translation, in Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), ix-xiv.

in the same time or space." When the dead woman reanimates as a result of her love for a living male, it normally takes place under the lead of the ghost, for "reanimation is a process mysteriously effected upon the ghost's body but registered on the corpse."[12] In the tradition of Chinese strange tales, if ghost and corpse stand for two different facets of the dead, then it is normally the ghost, not the corpse, that has agency.

While the story of man-hunting zombies was certainly created out of this long tradition of storytelling about the dead, zombie tales bring the corporeal body to the fore. A zombie is *shi* 屍 (corpse), not *gui* 鬼 (ghost). Furthermore, the non-dying body of the dead stands for the key anomaly of the dead. Stories of mysteriously non-decaying corpses appeared early in several medieval *zhiguai*, although these bodies were clearly different from the body of the living corpse that came to be called *jiangshi* in the Qing. For instance, *Soushen ji* 搜神記, produced around the fourth century, contains a number of tales about mysterious dead bodies in age-old tombs found without decomposition. The marvel of these non-decaying bodies here is conventionally captured by such phrases as [the corpse did not decay and thus] "looked as if alive," or "looked as before." Likewise, one of the stories in *Luyi ji* 錄異記 produced by the Tang-dynasty writer Du Guangting – active during the early tenth century – depicts the stiff corpse (*jiangshi*) of Wu Rui, the king of Changsha in the Han period (202BCE-220AD). In the story, Wu Rui's corpse was found without decomposition four hundred years after death, and looked "not different from [the way he looked] during his lifetime."[13] The mystery of these bodies is the non-decaying nature of the body itself, without any specter that interacts with humans. In a late-Ming encyclopedia, *Yuzhitang tanhui* 玉芝堂談薈, Xu Yingqiu compiled six tales of non-decaying bodies under the

[12] Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, 37-42.

[13] Du Guangting, *Luyiji,* in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Tainan: Zhuangyan wenhua, 1995), 8: 2.

title, “stiff corpses that did not decay” (*jiangshi bufu* 僵屍不腐). Here, even if Xu used the term *jiangshi*, it is far from the living corpses called *jiangshi* in Qing *zhiguai* tales. The undecaying corpses here include the bodies of renowned religious or historical figures, such as Yan Lugong and Yicun, whose marvelous bodies work as a manifestation of their extraordinary inner quality.[14]

Unlike these bodies, the most salient feature of *jiangshi* in Qing strange tales is that the corpses literally resurrect, walk out of coffins and hunt the living. The resurrected corpse is not the body of a high-profile figure, but that of some unknown person the protagonist happens to encounter in an unfamiliar environment. Their living bodies are horrific, rather than marvelous, due to the fact that the body revives only to prey on the living.

The most well-known story of this kind is Pu Songling’s “Shibian” produced in *Liaozhi zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 in 1766.[15] In the tale, a group of porters traveling in Shandong province spent a night in an inn. One of the rooms was used as a funeral chamber that stored the dead body of the daughter-in-law of the innkeeper who died recently. Since the inn was already full, the porters had no choice but to stay near the funeral chamber. In the middle of the night, one of the

[14] The descriptions of their bodies refer to the similar depiction of extraordinary physical traits. For instance, the story of Yan Lugong – a high official of the Tang court and Daoist immortal captures the moment when Yan’s coffin was opened for burial. When Yan’s body was exposed, it is said that “the corpse looked just as if alive. The side of his body was golden. His fingernails grew to reach the back of his hands. His hair also grew several *chi* 尺.” Likewise, the story of Yicun, the eminent monk of Chan Buddhism in the late Tang, describes how the “postmortem transformation” manifested on his body: it is said that his fair and fingernails continued to grow, and his body did not decompose for a hundred years. Xu Yingqiu, *Yuzhitang tanhui* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980), 14: 13.

[15] The publication year indicates that *Liaozhai zhiyi* was published posthumously, a century after the author’s death. *Liaozhai* was initially circulated in manuscript copies and the first preface dates 1679. In 1766, the first publication of *Liaozhai* was sponsored by Zhao Qigao. For the publication of *Liaozhai zhiyi*, see Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 17-42; Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 68-71.

travelers observed the corpse stepping out of the bed and walking toward the group. It then "bent over the men's bed and blew several times over the faces of the three sleeping travelers," which subsequently killed these men. Terrified, the traveler dashed out of the house, followed by the corpse that began to pursue him. The chase continued until the man hid behind a big willow tree. As the corpse stretched her arms to grab him, the man fell flat on the ground, leaving the corpse to grab the tree. The corpse then froze still, embracing the tree. The next morning, the two were found by villagers, while the survivor had barely recovered his consciousness. The corpse's fingers were curved like hooks and sunk deep into the tree trunk, and it required several men to remove the corpse from the tree.[16] The horror of the living corpse in this tale lies in the fact that the porters were drawn into a situation where they could not avoid contact with a corpse. The porters unintentionally stayed in close proximity to the corpse, without knowing what would happen. Lying on the death bed without a coffin, the corpse was open to the strangers' encroachment. However, the ominous contact turned out to be a disaster not to the dead but to the living.

While the above story is the best known (probably because of the literary fame of Pu), a few stories with a similar plot existed earlier. I was able to locate two such texts that contain similar stories on the corpse that revived from the death bed. The following tales are from *Zaolin zazu* 棗林雜俎 by Tan Qian and *Jiyuan jisuo ji* 寄園寄所寄 by Zhao Jishi, both of which were likely produced in the seventeenth century.[17]

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[16] Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), 652-3. Translation available in Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, 104-7.

[17] It is unknown exactly when the two texts were produced. Tan Qian was active during the first half of the seventeenth century and died in 1657, while Zhao Jishi was active in the latter half of the seventeenth century and died in 1706. Presumably, these texts would have been produced in the seventeenth century about a half century apart.

> A certain man in Luochuan county [Shanxi] died. Family members and relatives were dozing at the house at night when the corpse suddenly stumbled to its feet. Then it breathed in from people's mouths one by one. One of them was startled and escaped to hide outside of the door. The corpse followed him. As it reached the door, the two engaged in a fight. At dawn, people rushed in and sprayed dog's blood over it. The corpse fell prostrate. Within a month, those whom the corpse breathed from died one after another.[18]

> In Hangzhou, the father of a monk died. His body was put in a coffin and placed inside a room [in the temple where the monk was staying]. A guest was spending the night upstairs, holding a small wooden club for protection. About midnight…he saw a dark shadow of a person coming upstairs. At that time, a group of porters – who were staying at the temple to pick up the coffin – were asleep on the floor, snoring as loud as thunder. However, as the person sat down near their heads, the snoring ceased. The person then approached the bed [where the guest was lying]. The guest hit the person with the wooden bat, which made the person stagger and fall down. He lit a candle and observed the person, who turned out to be the corpse of the monk's father.[19]

Such tales depict the moment of the corpse's resurrection and its strange behavior that consequently brought death to the living people in the house of mourning. In these tales, the rising of corpses took place during the early stages of the funeral when families, relatives, guests, and laborers were gathering in order to pay condolences and mourn for the dead. The resurrection of corpses from the deathbed brought death to these people. It is interesting to see how the corpses killed those people. The first tale implies that the corpse, by breathing in from the living, stole their breath, i.e., their life force, while in the second tale, being near to the living's head produced a similar effect. Thus, the corpses took advantage of the environment crowded with the living.

In Dongshan Zhuren's tale titled "Jiangshi gui" 僵屍鬼 (zombie demon) produced in *Shuyi ji* 述異記 (1701), the corpse that similarly revived at night is called *jiangshi*. The plot is

[18] Tan Qian, *Zaolin zazu* (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1960), *heji*: 7.

[19] Zhao Jishi, *Jiyuan jisuo ji* (Hankou, Wensheng shujuyin, 1915), 5: 17.

more or less similar to the above tales and Pu Songling's "Shibian." The story begins with a brief remark about a place known for zombie lore: "in a certain area in Shandong, there was an abandoned old grave, from which a demonic corpse (*jiangshi*) often emerged to harm human beings." A group of travelers enter the village and spend a night in a house that happened to have a fresh corpse laid out inside. The corpse resurrects in the middle of the night and kills the sleeping travelers by "holding its palm above the lamp and smearing the [sleeping people's] faces with the soot." The one who had been awake observed this and dashed out of the house, only to be followed by the corpse. The two engage in the cat-and-mouse chase until the corpse bumps into a wall behind which the man was hiding.[20]

The above tales on revivified corpses commonly portray that the physical proximity between the corpse and the living people was instrumental to the corpse's revivification and its monstrous turn. The living and the dead, when staying in the same space, inevitably influence each other. Yuan Mei, the renowned *zhiguai* writer and famous poet of the eighteenth century, attempts to make sense of this phenomenon by drawing on the natural flow of the life force from a living body to a corpse:

> When a person dies, his *yangqi* 陽氣 is completely gone and the body is pure *yin*. Meanwhile, a living person is full of *yangqi*. [When a living person] unexpectedly makes contact [with a dead body], *yinqi* 陰氣 is suddenly opened(?) and the body absorbs *yangqi.* Therefore, [the corpse] is able to run and walk following the living. Those who stay near a corpse at night should be careful not to touch the corpse's feet when lying down. When a person lies down, *yangqi* emanates from the soles of the feet, just like an arrow shot from a bow passing through without any hindrance. When contacting the dead's feet, the *yangqi* of the living person would penetrate into the soles of the feet of the dead, making the corpse stand up.[21]

[20] Dongxuan zhuren, *Shuyiji* (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1968), 2: 15-6. I followed Lydia Chiang's Translation. Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, 107.

[21] Yuan Mei, *Xu xinqixie* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 5: 1.

Thus, the living and the dead embody opposite kinds of *qi*, and a corpse would naturally absorb a living person's *yangqi* when the two make a physical contact. Thus, the corpse is likely "activated" when its surrounding is populated by living people and thus full of the life force.

This, however, does not mean that a corpse "mechanically" responds to the surrounding environment. As seen from the above tales, the living corpses actively pursued and sought to kill the living. A number of *zhiguai* writers, including Yuan Mei himself, noted that the monstrous turn of a corpse was only possible by the involvement of an evil specter. Yuan Mei's "Scholar of Nanchang" vividly illustrates the moment of the dead's transformation into a man-hunting corpse. In the tale, the dead man, shortly after his passing, appeared to an old friend in order to say farewell and to leave a will. When facing the friend, the dead was in a physical form that was no different from when he was alive. Upon completing the conversation, the dead departed from its body, which Yuan Mei describes as follows:

> … [After a brief chat with the friend,] he [the dead] stood up again and said: "I am leaving now." However, he stood there without moving forward, staring wide-eyed. His features grew ugly and slowly began to decay. The young man [the friend of the dead] became frightened and urged him: "Since you have finished speaking, please go now." The body did not move. The young man beat the bed and cried out but the body still did not leave and simply kept standing there. Much more frightened now, the young man got up and rushed out. The corpse rushed out after him. The faster the young man ran, the faster the corpse ran. The corpse followed the young man for several miles until at last the latter climbed over a wall and collapsed on the ground…

This passage vividly captures the moment when the spirit of the dead leaves the body. The body did not decay as long as the spirit was still attached to it. Once the spirit was gone, however, the body stopped being a human and began to pursue the friend, trying to kill him. According to Yuan Mei, this is because the body was now subject to the control of the corporeal soul that was deprived of any human consciousness:

> …The heavenly soul [*hun*] of man is virtuous while his earthly soul [*po*] is evil. The former is intelligent while the latter is obtuse. When the dead man first came, his intelligence was still intact, so the earthly soul could be attached to the heavenly soul and move [together]. When the heavenly soul left and his worry was resolved, the heavenly soul dissolved while the earthly soul remained. As long as the heavenly soul stayed, he kept his human personality; but when it left, he lost his human personality…[22]

In other words, once the spirit is gone, the body loses its nature as a human being. Thus, even if the resurrected body looked like the dead person in revived form, the body was no longer that person anymore but merely a material remnant that only followed the evil corporeal soul.

Ji Yun, another famed scholar-official and *zhiguai* writer of the eighteenth century, made a similar comment:

> When a person dies, his form (*xing* 形) and spirit (*shen* 神) separate. If the spirit does not reattach to the body, how could that person move with consciousness? If the spirit does attach to the body, which means that the person is revivified, why would he act like an evil monster (*yao* 妖), not a human being? A fresh corpse that resurrects would seize parents and children and thrust its ten fingers into the flesh and bones of the living. If it does not have consciousness (*zhi* 智), how could it jump up? If it does have consciousness, how come it does not recognize the family? This should be because the body is possessed by an evil thing, enticed by erroneous *qi*; this is different from the transformation of a wandering soul (*youhun zhi bian* 遊魂之變)...[23]

Again, the key issue here is how the body remained alive without a spirit. Ji Yun's answer is that an alien *qi* – and not the dead's own soul – captures the body and commands it to hurt the living. Again, since the body is totally deprived of the spirit, the living corpse is ontologically different

[22] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu, 'What the Master Would Not Discuss', According to Yuan Mei (1716-1798): A Collection of Supernatural Stories*, trans. Paolo Santangelo (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 168-169.

[23] Ji Yun, *Yuewei caotang biji* (Tainan: Hanfeng chubanshe, 2006), 294.

from a ghost – that is, a wandering soul. The only way to make sense of the corpse's inhuman behavior is that the body is merely the host of an alien vicious spirit.

It appears that both Yuan Mei and Ji Yun interpreted the strange resurrection of dead bodies by drawing on the philosophy of *qi*, which was the dominant intellectual trend of the eighteenth century. Several cohorts of Ji and Yuan – including Ji Yun himself – theorized the transformations of *qi* through the *yin-yang* modes of interaction, through which they attempted to reinterpret the natural cosmic rule. The *qi* philosophy particularly lent explanation to several phenomena that were deemed strange, or supernatural, such as the birth of twins, omens, incantations, geomancy, and reincarnation.[24] By referring to the *qi*-based cosmic theory, both Yuan and Ji were likely attempting to bring the new literary trope into the familiar theme of the strange. At the same time, however, the above comments clarify how the trope of the living corpse was different from the conventional ghostly figure: a living corpse does not act under the agency of a ghost. It does not have the ability the ghost normally has, such as telling why it was unhappy – by which it could have the living hear its story and appeal to them to seek a solution. It is purely a corporeal being whose threat is articulated only through corporeal means.

III. The Homeless Corpse: Displacement as a Sign of Marginality

As explained in the previous section, *jiangshi* figured centrally in narratives of the living dead that newly became a popular genre of storytelling in the eighteenth century. Let us now turn to a closer investigation of the circumstances that produced *jiangshi*. This will provide some insight into the kinds of social concerns embedded in the narratives. The question is why, in mid-Qing narratives of the strange, corpses suddenly became the protagonist of strange tales that

[24] Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, 130-139.

could create fear and drama independent of their ghost. We can explore this question by examining what kind of people became living corpses and why this happened to them. Related to this question, Ji Yun claimed that a corpse would transform into *jiangshi* in two different circumstances: first, a recently dead body, before it was put into a coffin, would suddenly "stumble to its feet" and capture the living; second, a body that had long been dead without decomposition would transform into a demonic figure and appear in the middle of the night to seize the living.[25] While the two types of the living corpse may seem different from each other, both of these occasions are closely related to the specific mortuary context, i.e., when a corpse is in unrestrained conditions because it was not treated properly following the standard mortuary rites. In the former case, a corpse is yet to be placed in a coffin; in the latter case, a corpse is most often left without proper burial. In other words, the two situations stand for the context when the dead body is displaced from the space it was supposed to occupy, and instead remains in the realm of the living.

The problem of disposing of the dead was increasingly perceived as an empire-wide social problem by the eighteenth century.[26] Notably, these corpses were not so much the victims of unusual occasions, such as war and natural disaster, as the products of popular burial customs called delayed burial, that is, postponing burial until the family could arrange a suitable burial site during which a coffin was placed in a house or above ground. In local gazetteers, numerous compilers testified to the pervasive practice of delayed burial. Records of the popular custom of delaying burial and instead disposing of the coffin in a temple had already emerged in the Song, and by the Qing period, numerous social critiques commonly pointed to delayed burial as one of

[25] Ji Yun, *Yuewei caotang biji*, 294.

[26] William Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 435.

the "vulgar customs" deeply rooted in local practices in several localities, particularly the northern and southeastern parts of the empire.[27] In her examination of Qing gazetteer records, Susan Naquin also affirms the widespread practice of disposing of a coffin in a temporary site in North China, based on which she asserts that "the sight of coffins awaiting burial was a common one."[28] According to J. J. M. De Groot, a Dutch sinologist who visited Amoy (Xiamen, located in southern Fujian province) in the late nineteenth century, the custom of "entrusting others with a coffin" was a commonplace in late nineteenth-century Amoy, particularly "when the dead man's family seat [was] in another part of the empire." De Groot particularly stresses the pervasive nature of such practice by saying that "scarcely a day passed on which [he] did not see several [coffins placed on the ground]." Most coffins waiting for interment would be housed in a temple or on empty land, the sides of a hill, the banks of rivers and canals, and by the wayside, sometimes covered by a straw mat, other times without any cover.[29] This topic will be examined more substantially in chapter 2, but here, I want to highlight that the emergence of the living corpse in Qing strange tales significantly resonates with the historical context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which a substantial number of unburied dead bodies provoked discomfort and debates among Qing critiques.

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[27] Patricia Ebrey, "The Response of the Sung State to Popular Funeral Practices," in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, 217. It is difficult to determine whether the practice was more prevalent in the Qing than in the Song, or the practice was consistently prevalent but only became a serious social problem in the Qing. We have to rely mostly on anecdotal accounts produced by elite writers or government officials, and there are no statistical data systematically compiled to count the number of unburied dead bodies in any period. My sense is that writings and comments on delayed burial generally increased in the Qing, which indicates that delayed burial did become more prevalent in the Qing and people increasingly recognized this practice problematic in the Qing. The increase of writings on this practice of course could be partially due to the general growth of literary production in the Qing than in the Song. Still, in Qing materials, this way of looking at the social practice of death became generalized and more ubiquitous. In my view, this certainly testifies to the increase of the practice itself and the growing visibility of the practice in the eyes of those who commented on society.

[28] Susan Naquin, "Funerals in North China,"42.

[29] J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China* (Taipei: The Literature House, Ltd., 1964), 129-132.

Being unburied meant that the dead was in an unstable state. In Chinese philosophy, death was understood as a process of *hun* and *po* separating from each other. Once separating, "the intelligent spirit (*hun-qi* 魂氣) returns to heaven; the body and the animal soul (*xing-po* 形魄) returns to the earth."[30] Death rituals are the device to help this process occur smoothly and further aid *hun* and *po* to settle in the right places: the ancestral tablet for the former, and the grave for the latter. Thus, the dead go through the dual process of dislocation from their previous position and relocation into their new position as they transit from this world to the other world; once the process is complete, the dead would transform from a human to an ancestor. However, a corpse could transform into a zombie if this process did not occur smoothly or remained incomplete. When left without burial, the body-*po* fail to settle in the resting place and roam around freely in the world to which the dead no longer belonged.

In a sense, the menace of the living corpse could be seen as a kind of death pollution that occurs because of the unnatural – or inappropriate – condition of the dead. According to James Watson who pioneered the study of the Chinese notion of death pollution, pollution (*shaqi* 煞氣) occurs when "the corpse is physically moved and the spirit is thought to be undergoing a transition," such as the stage of encoffining. It was believed that looking on the corpse during this transition would "invite terrible retribution from the disembodied and unpredictable spirit." In addition, Watson stresses that this sort of "active" pollution caused by an unstable spirit was much more critical and fatal than the "passive" pollution caused by decomposing flesh.[31] In other words, death pollution was less about physical decay than about the instability of the spirit before the body and the soul were settled in appropriate places.

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[30] *Li Chi*, 444.

[31] James Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. Maurice Bloch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 159.

Historical sources mention similar anxiety over the pollution created at the early stage of a funeral, including the custom of *bisha* 避煞 (avoiding *sha*) widely practiced in the Jiangnan area. *Sha* referred to the deadly force produced from death that was believed to attack the living.[32] It appears that, at least from the medieval period, *sha* 煞 connoted a peculiar form of death pollution produced from the body prior to interment. For instance, a Tang-dynasty strange account, *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志, writes:

> …among the common people, it is believed that, in a few days after a person dies, there should be a bird that comes out of a coffin. This is called *sha* ...This happens when a fresh corpse's *qi* transforms.[33]

Hong Mai, the famed Song-dynasty writer of strange accounts, *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, left a similar record on the custom of *bisha*:

> …in the folk societies of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, people widely believe within the communication between shaman and ghost. After a person dies, *po* comes back on a certain day. People would calculate the day (of *po*'s return) and escape from the house, which is called *bisha*. They would instead leave a servant or a monk to guard the place and spread ashes on the ground to check the traces (of *sha*'s visitation) the next day.[34]

Thus, *sha* was the pollution generated by the transformation of the dead's bodily *qi* into a noxious specter.

As Hong Mai noted, warding off *sha* was an important element of folk death cults in Jiangnan throughout the late imperial period. Henry Doré, a French Jesuit who visited Shanghai in the first decade of the twentieth century, also observed the popular belief in *sha*. According to Doré, *sha* appeared in the form of monstrous creatures, for example, "the female spectre has the

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[32] See Ebrey, "The response of the Sung state," 211-2.

[33] Xu, *Yuzhitang*, 13: 6-7.

[34] Hong Mai, *Yijianzhi* (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1941), *yizhi*, 19: 152.

head of a woman and the body of a hen, while the masculine phantom appears with the head of a man and the body of a cock."[35] At the day of its return, the family would invite religious practitioners to the house in order to "receive the ghost and recite incantation classics to ward off all danger."[36]

While there is no clear link between the *sha* in the above accounts and the living corpse in Qing *zhiguai* tales, both accounts share the logic that the dead in an unstable state will bring disaster to the living; furthermore, the unstable condition when *jiangshi* emerge is almost always related to the lack of permanent burial. The most conspicuous sign of displacement is the venue where the living encounter *jiangshi*. The home of these corpses is not the grave, but the coffin located in the temporary spot of disposal, such as a temple, inn, funeral chamber, and old graveyard, i.e., an open and public space where anyone could freely step in and bother the dead. We already saw examples from the stories discussed in the previous section, in which the protagonists were porters, workers, or travelers who were spending a night near an unburied corpse. There are plenty of other examples. The tale of encountering *jiangshi* recorded in *Yetan suilu* 夜談隨錄 (1791), for instance, talks about a civil service examination candidate who was lodged in an old temple while he was visiting Beijing in order to take the metropolitan examination. In the middle of the night, a monstrous corpse appeared from one of the unburied coffins deposited in the graveyard behind the temple.[37] In a tale recorded in Xu Feng'en's

[35] Henry Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstition* (Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Publishing Company, 1966), vol.3, 143.

[36] De Groot documented a similar kind of custom that he observed in Amoy, where people would keep the body of the dead in the family's dwelling "in expectation that [the dead] might revive, [the family would] set out food and drink by [the dead's] side, in order that the manes, hovering about the body and expected to return therein, might at any time satisfy their hunger and thirst." Here, although he did not mention *sha*, the return of the dead's ghost conceivably would have been taken as ominous event similar to the *sha*'s return. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 378.

[37] Hebang'e, *Yetan suilu* (Shanghai: Qizhi shuju, 1934), 154-155.

Lisheng 里棖 (1874), a yamen functionary traveling in Hunan found an inn to spend a night and shared a room with a person lying in a bed, who the protagonist thought was a sick man. However, that person turned out to be a corpse as it resurrected in the middle of the night and revealed its pale face that "did not look like that of the living."[38]

Having long been displaced, the *jiangshi* that appear in these circumstances are normally deformed, developing several distinct physical anomalies. A number of tales depict the living corpse as a beast-like creature that presents a monstrous appearance. For instance, in *Yetan suilu,* the author writes about a living corpse that was "covered in white hair as long as over a *cun* 寸, a mouth was opened wider than the jaw, and the finger nails were as sharp as claws of a beast."[39] Similarly, the corpse in Yuan Mei's "The Green Hairy Monster" recorded in *Zibuyu* 子不語 was disfigured to the extent that "the head and overall shape were like those of a human, but from its deep-set eyes shone a bright light, and they were as big as walnuts. Below the neck, the monster's body was completely covered in green fur as thick as a coir raincoat." In another tale of Yuan Mei, "Stiff Corpse Holding Weituo Buddha," a corpse that emerged from an old coffin placed in a temple was "covered from head to toe in white fur, as if wearing a coat made of snow weasel fur that had been turned inside out. His face too was covered in white hair, framing the darkest of eyes: however, his pupils were a dazzling green."[40]

The beast-like depictions imply that these corpses were liminal beings – something between human and non-human. Physically, the body did not belong to the dead's space – that is, a grave – but stayed at the fringe of the human world. Not being able to go through the normal

[38] Xu Feng'en, *Licheng* (Taipei, Wenhai chubanshe, 2002), 3: 18-19.

[39] Hebang'e, *Yetan suilu*, 154-155.

[40] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, 572, 1069; Hebang'e, *Yetan suilu*, 154-155.

process of decomposition – which was supposed to occur in a grave – these corpses transformed into something else, an anomalous predator. Monsterizing a corpse like this echoes the literary expression of anxiety toward transgressive alien beings, such as foxes, that proliferated in the eighteenth-century *zhiguai*.[41] Although these corpses were never called "alien kind" (*yilei* 異類), as foxes were called, they certainly represented the transgressive beings in some state of existence between this world and the underworld.

The physical marginality of monstrous corpses further attests to their social marginality. The fact that these corpses were left unburied indicates that they failed to transform into an ancestor and to claim a legitimate position in the world of the dead. These corpses were homeless, so to speak. They were the corporeal embodiment of wandering ghosts, who were locked in the living's realm and had to live by preying on the living permanently. The hungry corpse in Yuan Mei's "*Jiangshi* Seeks Food" is a perfect illustration. The story depicts the miserable afterlife of an age-old corpse disposed in a temple. Every night, it would escape the coffin and roam around looking for food to feed itself. The corpse's appearance demonstrates its long-term starvation, for "the face was withered and black like dried meat and [the] eyes were deeply set in their sockets." One night, a man put red beans, irons, and rice around the coffin in

[41] Aside from foxes, numerous other alien beings appeared from the medieval period on. Kao mentions that the "supernatural beings that existed in the animistic world" – called goblins, demons, ogres, etc. – were another group of beings referred to by *gui* besides the apparitions of the dead. These beings were believed to have "inhabited the world of nature, the world beyond human civilization" while occasionally "intrude into the human world to beguile humans." Meanwhile, Campany puts more stress on their hybridity [i.e., cross-species combination of traits] as well as their human-like behavior, which makes them a part of the human moral community. Huntington's examination of Qing fox tales focuses more on the anxiety toward the moral ambivalence embodied in this "middle species," i.e., the possible dissolution of the boundary between human and other. Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales,* 8; Campany, *Strange Writing*, 384; Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 323-41.

order to prevent the corpse from returning back to its coffin.[42] Being put in a spot, the corpse begs for mercy, pleading:

> I have no children, so I haven't received any sacrifices for a long time. To satisfy my hunger, I must go out in search of something to eat. However, today you have thwarted my plans, as I am unable to get back into my coffin. I will die if you don't clear away those red beans, bits of iron and rice... Why are you being so cruel? I bear no animosity towards you![43]

Thus, the marginal social status of the dead – that is, having no family who offers sacrifices – translates into the marginal position in the afterlife – that is, always having to find food on his own, which make him to prey on the living.

Because of the marginal status of these beings, dealing with these bodies required destruction and elimination rather than reciprocity. The miserable hungry corpse in "*Jiangshi* Seeks Food" met real death as it was put in a fire. In fact, this was the fate of most living corpses. Exterminating the threat of these demonic beings was possible only by annihilating their monstrous bodies. In a sense, burning these corpses was a due punishment meted out to the displaced social members. The punishment was carried out by means of public exorcism through which the living could punish the alien predator and restore order. The extermination of evil was demonstrated through the spectacle that happens amid burning, such as the wailing of the specter as it was expelled from this world.[44] Upon the burning of the corpse, the tales mostly end with such remarks as "the catastrophe stopped," and "there was peace again."

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[42] I was not able to identify why these objects were useful for fighting off a zombie. In my guess, these may imply the performance of exorcistic rituals for expelling a demonic being.

[43] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, 689-90.

[44] Just to give one example, when the living corpse in *Yetan suilu* was burned, "strange noise" spread accompanied by incredibly disgusting smell. Other tales have similar descriptions of the sound. Hebang'e, *Yetan suilu,* 154-155.

This is a revealing point, considering the Qing official disapproval of burning a corpse. As will be discussed more in chapter 2, burning a dead body – for whatever reasons – was defined as a felony crime as well as an inhumane way of disposing of the dead. Although the law against burning a dead body did not eradicate cremation from Qing society, still, at least in the level of discourse, cremation as death ritual lost its legitimacy throughout the Ming and Qing, as evident in the moralistic attack against cremation in the Confucian discourse of popular death rituals.[45] Then, how could such an arguably "inhumane" practice work as a universal solution to the troubles caused by demonic dead bodies?

To be sure, writers were ambivalent about this issue. Yuan Mei, whose numerous zombie tales ended with burning the cursed corpses, wrote two short tales on how the burning of dead bodies would bring misfortune. One of the tales revolves around the body of a Taoist master that had been lying in a grave for over forty years and was found without any signs of decay. When the body was put in a fire and then thrown into a river, the wailing noise of a ghost alarmed the whole village at night. This event stopped as a villager retrieved the body from the river and buried it in the earth. In another tale, a farmer who cremated his father's body was cursed by the father's ghost at night and subsequently died of a strange illness the next day.[46] In these tales, the burning of the bodies gave rise to an opposite result from burning *jiangshi*: it brought catastrophe as the ghost took revenge for the inhumane acts these people had committed. What are the differences between these bodies and *jiangshi*? One answer may be that the dead in the above two tales were not marginal; rather, they were a religious saint and a father, who were supposed to have rightful places in the afterlife. The catastrophe was the punishment against the living's failure to fulfill their duty toward the dead who deserved respectful treatment. In contrast, a

[45] Patricia Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," *The American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 425-8.

[46] Yuan Mei*, Zibuyu*, 1221.

jiangshi, having lost its human spirit, was an alien kind that did not deserve equal treatment with these worthy dead. The rule of reciprocity between the living and the dead does not work here because these corpses were not the rightful spirit nor the ghost.

How can we make sense of such a strong hostility to the corpse abandoned without a family? It clearly contrasts the sense of moral responsibility towards hungry ghosts articulated in medieval ghost tales. In these tales, ghosts were threatening beings but at the same time something that needed and deserved the living's help. As Campany remarked, the medieval *zhiguai* significantly extended the cosmic reciprocity to the range of people beyond the boundary of family, forging "new kinds of moral, social, ritual, and emotional ties with the ghosts of strangers as well as those of ancestors.[47] Thus, the prevalence of the narratives of ghostly vengeance in medieval strange accounts attests to the understanding that the living and the dead were part of the same moral economy. That is, "although the dead are ontologically liminal beings normally removed from the realm of the living…they are not morally liminal, not outside the network of obligation."[48] In a similar vein, saving hungry ghosts – not only the souls of ancestors but all the souls of the dead – from suffering in hell had been the central motif of religious festivals and discourses from the medieval period on, which persisted in the Qing era.[49] In a sense, medieval ghost tales and ritual practices point to the awareness that reciprocity between the living and the dead was a kind of universal morality. Stories of monstrous corpses that violently prey on the living divorce from this notion of reciprocity and instead deliver a

[47] Robert Campany, "Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dyansties Zhiguai," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 13 (1991) : 18. Also see Mu-chou Poo, "The Completion of an Ideal World: The Human Ghost in Early-Medieval China," *Asia Major* 10 (1997): 81.

[48] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 378.

[49] Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

completely different message. These corpses are detrimental to the living, something that must be destroyed for the sake of the living's wellbeing.

The trope of *jiangshi* stands for the new character of the dead that was created out of an anxiety about displacement, which I find is in line with the anxiety toward the rootless and unattached people among the living of the mid Qing. Matthew Sommer has shown that being without a family became a definitive mark of anomalous and dangerous males called "rootless rascals." The Qing anxiety toward these people culminated in a series of legal measures during the eighteenth century that criminalized the rootless status, or "stand(ing) outside of the mainstream family order."[50] In other words, the key source of their delinquency – as interpreted in the law – derived from the fact that they were not part of the household-based moral order that the Qing imperial state deemed standard. The absence of family and the lack of settled place of living was further linked to the high physical mobility and vagrancy. The famous sorcery trial of 1768 examined by Philip Kuhn involved a number of wandering people under the guise of Buddhist monks who made a living by drifting, begging, and engaging in criminal activities.[51] In nineteenth-century Huaibei, an area that chronically suffered from dense population and low farming productivity, legions of seasonally mobile populations – without family and permanent settlement – constituted the criminal gangs that engaged in smuggling and banditry.[52] Therefore, the unsettled, both living and dead, shared the traits of vagrancy and potential criminality that made them social outcasts. *Jiangshi* were the morbid counterpart of the unsettled, family-less,

[50] Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 93-101.

[51] Kuhn, *Soulstealers,* 105-113.

[52] Elizabeth Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 54-80. *Pengmin* (the shed people) in the Yangzi highlands were also the usual pool of mobile populations utilized for criminal activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Averill, "The Shed People," 84-126; Osborne, "The Local Politics of Land Reclamation," 1-46.

and rootless population that increasingly became a sign of disorder throughout the eighteenth century.

IV. Corpses That Bring Catastrophe: Exorcizing Drought Demons in North China

To what extent did these depictions of attacks by monstrous living corpses resonate with real-life experience? So far, I have focused on reading the zombie tales in relation to the fear and trauma of encountering unburied dead bodies – which means that the literary character was presumably created out of the authors' perception of what was going wrong in the real life. *Jiangshi* was a powerful tool through which writers were able to address the social problem of dislocation and degeneration of ethics pertaining to death. There was yet another way in which the trope of *jiangshi* was useful. *Jiangshi* appeared in a series of sources that address a peculiar local custom of rainmaking in the regions in North China. Widely called *dahan guzhuang* 打旱骨椿, this custom often included violent desecration of graves and mutilation of dead bodies that were suspected to be the drought demon, called *hanba* 旱魃. The narrative of strange living corpses in these cases was produced in a different genre of texts, imperial criminal documents, in which zombies were created out of different social contexts and produced different ramifications. Based on four legal cases of drought-demon exorcism retrieved from routine memorials produced in the nineteenth century, this section shows how the fear of demonized dead bodies resonated with the anxiety about the real-life catastrophe.

The logic behind the practice of mutilating a dead body for the purpose of rainmaking was the belief that a drought demon incarnated in a dead body and caused a drought in the neighboring area. Such belief appears to have been quite widespread in the late Qing, particularly in northern areas around Shandong province, although it is unclear exactly when and how such

practices originated from. The textual reference to the drought demon goes back to an ancient text, *Shenyijing* 神異經, in which the drought demon is described as "a man-like creature two or three feet high, with a naked body and an eye on the top of its head." It further notes that the region where the demon appears would be struck by a calamitous drought.[53] However, it does not mention any dead body related to the emergence of the demon. The earliest accounts that link drought to a dead body are from the seventeenth century. For instance, a well-known late-Ming *biji* collection, *Wuzazu* 五雜組 (1616), has a record that people in Hebei and Shandong areas would dig up and destroy the fresh dead body of a child in order to lift a drought. Li Fan, the magistrate of Huang county, Shandong province, writing during the Kangxi era, also mentioned the local practice of identifying a fresh corpse as *hanba*.[54]

While the notion of drought demon incarnating in a corpse existed before the Qing era, from the mid-Qing on, the belief of the drought demon absorbed the *jiangshi* trope, possibly as *jiangshi* popularized and came to represent the monstrous character of the dead body. Several mid- and late-Qing records often identified the drought demon with *jiangshi*. For instance, Ji Yun commented that "[people would say that] *hanba* is *jiangshi*; so if they dig the body up and burn it, then rain would fall."[55] Reginald Johnston, a Scottish diplomat who administered Weihaiwei – an island located at the easternmost edge of Shandong peninsula that was leased to the British in 1898 – in the late nineteenth century, provides an account of "corpse superstition" that involves the belief in the demon-possessed corpse: a corpse that absorbed the tear-drops of his mourners

[53] Reginald Johnston, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1910), 297; Dongfang Shuo, *Shenyijing* (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan yinxing, 1965), 5.

[54] Xie Zhaozhe, *Wuzazu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 228-9; *Huangxianzhi* (1673), 8: 17-9. A famed writer, Pu Songling, also recorded the poetic descriptions of the practice. B. J. ter Harr, *Telling Stories: Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 290-2.

[55] Ji Yun, *Yuewei caotang biji*, 164.

would develop "quasi-vitality" in his grave, growing feathers and wings, and further attract all the moisture to his grave, causing drought in the village."[56] Here, the monstrous transformation of a corpse into a beast-like figure resembles the description of the living corpses that appeared in eighteenth-century *jiangshi* tales. A drought demon was normally identified through searching suspicious graves during the time of drought. Several records indicate that a grave with unusually moist and soft soil was normally seen as a spot where a drought demon could be located. People would subsequently exhume the coffin, strike down the body, and burn it to ashes.[57] The merging of *hanba* and *jiangshi* characters is also evident in a number of *zhiguai* tales. For instance, in the tale of *jiangshi* in *Yetan suilu* (introduced on page 39), when the monstrous corpse that emerged out of an unburied coffin was caught, an observer sighed, "this summer was strangely dry without a drop of rain, which must be the drought demon's oppression (*hanba wei nüe*)!" Similarly, in a tale titled "Drought Demon" recorded in *Yeke lanyu* 野客讕語 (1886), two travelers defeated three monstrous corpses that emerged from abandoned coffins. The travelers subsequently burned the bodies, which put an end to the three-year long drought that had plagued the region. As rain began to pour, people realized that the corpses were in fact the drought demon.[58] In these tales, the *jiangshi*'s menace to individual travelers is easily translated into the collective calamity affecting the whole community.

It is important to note here that there exist certain gaps between the drought-bringing *jiangshi* and the *jiangshi* in the Qing tales of living corpses: while the latter normally emerge from unburied coffins, the former were already buried and then found in a grave. It remains unclear why such a gap exists. It appears that, in the real-life situations of drought, destroying

[56] Johnston, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China*, 295-7.

[57] Johnston, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China*, 295-7.

[58] Maobin yeke, *Yeke lanyu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1985), 1: 15-8.

unburied bodies was not an option to lift the drought, although people did think unburied bodies could cause natural calamities and epidemics – which will be discussed in chapter 4. Therefore, we may be dealing with different types of reasoning that both touch on *jiangshi*. What the two types of *jiangshi* do share, meanwhile, is the body that strangely stays alive. Therefore, the possible explanation is that the *jiangshi* trope that originally appeared in literary accounts was taken out of the context of unburial and instead adapted to new contexts of drought and the existing custom of destroying dead bodies in response to natural disasters.

The Qing government maintained an uneasy attitude toward this custom of corpse mutilation. Mutilating dead bodies in the fear of their mysterious power was obviously against the Confucian ethical precept regarding the sanctity of the dead. Such imperial stance was formalized in 1803 when the Jiaqing emperor promulgated a new substatute that specifically governed the cases of destroying dead bodies in order to stop a drought.[59] In his edict, the emperor criticized the "preposterous belief" regarding "the age-old *jiangshi* becoming *hanba*," which instigated "low and ignorant villagers" to destroy a suspicious grave and mutilate the body inside.[60] In other words, in the imperial eyes, these practices fell into a superstition caused by wrongful beliefs.

The legislation of 1803 was prompted by a grave desecration case that took place in Gaomi county, Shandong province, in 1802.[61] Here, Li Zhiqian, the son of Li Xiande, accused Zhong the Second and others of desecrating his father's grave and mutilating the corpse. Li Xiande died in February of 1802 and was buried in a grave located east of the village. According

[59] Xue Yunsheng, *Duli cunyi* (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970), 31: 743-744.

[60] *Jiaqingchao shangyudang* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000), 9: 336.

[61] Source materials for this case include *Neige daku dang'an* (Academia Sinica, Taipei), 199622, 217827, 293063; *Gongzhong dang'an* (The First Historical Archives, Beijing), 04-01-8-25-1.

to Li Zhiqian, a rumor began to spread in the summer that Li Xiande's corpse transformed into a drought demon and caused a drought in the village. Furthermore, on July 13th, Li Zhiqian heard that villagers including Second Zhong were gathering people and money to desecrate Li Xiande's grave. Li and his brother guarded the grave while preparing to file a plea to the county magistrate. On the night of July 15th, however, the bothers heard a commotion from east of village and went to the scene, finding that Zhong the Second and others were about to exhume the coffin. Notwithstanding the Li brothers' attempt to stop it, the gang took the coffin out and set fire to Li Xiande's corpse. In the end, the brothers were able to secure only portions of the body, including hands and feet, a lower tooth, and one piece of skull.

After the event, Li Zhiqian made several unsuccessful attempts to bring the case to the judicial court. The county magistrate declined to adjudicate this case on the grounds that it was "difficult to determine the exact circumstances," for the case did not fit the substatute on "burning a corpse to drive out foxes by emitting smoke."[62] Li subsequently appealed to the prefectural court, but he was disappointed to see that only Zhong the Second and Sha the Fifth were arrested while other participants were set free. Li further claimed that Zhong the Second bribed yamen personnel to delay the processing of the case.

When this case finally reached the Shandong governor's office, the governor blamed the county magistrate for "taking a serious matter lightly" and adjudicated the case in light of uncovering a grave (*fazhong* 發冢). The governor summarized what happened as follows:

> ... At that time, the weather was extremely dry. [Second Zhong and others] saw Li Xiande's grave was damp and suspected that the corpse was a drought demon. Upon destroying the grave and exposing the body, they saw the flesh did not decompose at all, which confirmed their suspicion.

[62] Xue, *Duli cunyi*, 31: 739.

In other words, the offenders observed the omen of the drought demon from Li Xiande's grave, and their suspicion was confirmed when they witnessed the body of Li Xiande that did not have any sign of decomposition. Thus, Li Xiande's body was a *jiangshi*. The eye-witness description of Li Xiande's mysterious body indicated that they clearly believed that the rumor was true.

Furthermore, the crime report claimed that the desecration was different from banditry or personal vendetta. Zhong the Second testified that he went to the gravesite on July 15th to inspect the grave, and then found a huge mob of people that he did not know. When Sha the Fifth and eight other people were about to make a move, the Li brothers stepped in to protect the grave. The rest of the crowd stood still to watch the situation. Zhong the Second then shouted at the Lis: "[this body] causes harm not just to your family but to all villagers!" He further shouted at the crowd to encircle the grave in order to prevent the drought demon from fleeing. The mob then began to move, restraining the Li bothers and demolishing the grave. Thus, Zhong the Second "spontaneously initiated the instigation," not out of personal grudge but out of collectively-shared fear and anxiety. [63]

These three elements – observing the omen, confirming the body of the demon, and carrying out exorcism by destroying the body – characterized the key nature of this kind of crimes. Under this framework, the crime was chiefly motivated by the belief in the power of monstrous corpses. In an 1826 case from Anyang county, Henan province, Li Kuiyuan and four other men destroyed the body of Ren Yunü, a daughter of Ren Fengyu who died in February of 1825 at the age of 12 *sui* 歲. Ren buried his daughter in his private land located 8 *li* 里 away

[63] Legally, he was made the principal following the rule of determining the principal and accessories in the category of "Affrays and Blows." Here, in case of a confused fight when it was unknown who inflicted the first and the last blows or left the heaviest and the lightest wound, "the one who planned the act [was] taken as the principal and the others [were] accessories. If there [was] no one who planned, then the one first to get into the fight with the other [was] the principal." William Jones, *The Great Qing Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 287.

from the city. Three months later, Ren heard from one of his tenant farmers that "several unknown people" claimed that Ren Yunü was the drought demon and thus must be destroyed. When Ren went to check the grave, the body had already been burned. Li Kuiyuan and other culprits were all farmers dwelling in the neighboring village, "having no personal acquaintance with Ren Fengyu." They confessed that the time between spring and summer was dry, causing several villagers anxious about a bad wheat harvest. Then they heard people saying "when there is a drought, there must be the drought demon that causes it." One day, Li and others were passing by Ren Yunü's grave and observed that the grave was unusually damp. Suspecting that Ren Yunü's body was a drought demon, they came back to the grave the next day (August 7th), destroyed the grave and took out the girl's dead body that remained without decomposition. Affirming that the body was a drought demon, they set fire to the coffin. The culprits claimed that "there was no coercion and enmity nor extortion," arguing that they were purely responding to the drought.[64]

In a similar case that happened in 1839 in Ninghai department, Shandong, the victim was née Jie, the mother of a man named Jiang Piji. Jiang buried his mother in the ancestral graveyard after she hanged herself. In the summer of that year, Jiang Hualan, a farmer with several plots of farmland and a distant relative (*tongzong wufu* 同宗無服) of Jiang Piji, was extremely anxious about a drought. One day, he heard villagers saying that "drought is caused by a drought demon, which is the product of *jiangshi*'s transformation. Once a clammy grave is destroyed, there must be rain." On August 21st, Jiang Hualan passed by née Jie's grave and examined the earth that covered the grave mound. It was clammy, unlike those from other graves nearby. Jiang Hualan suspected that née Jie's body had become the drought demon, and subsequently passed this

[64] *Xingke tiben* (The First Historical Archives, Beijing), 2-1-7-10602-7.

information on to seven neighbors who were also worried about a bad grain crop. They decided to inspect the corpse together. Upon arriving at the gravesite, they used weaponry to demolish the grave mound and opened the coffin lid. They saw that the corpse was yet to decompose. They all were convinced that the body was a drought demon. They brought boiled water and poured it on the corpse to wash away the flesh. Then, they put the coffin back inside the grave and left.[65]

Following the substatutes on grave desecration for the purpose of expelling a drought demon, the principals in all the above three cases were sentenced to strangulation after autumn assizes. However, it appears that the culprits were treated with a certain degree of leniency (except Li Kuiyuan, who died in prison) because they all more or less persuaded the jurists that they did not commit the crime out of a personal grudge. Thus, this rule of leniency was in a sense a negotiation point between the criminality of corpse mutilation and the legitimacy of the fear of *jiangshi*; desecrating a body for exorcistic purposes was a heinous crime, but not as heinous as desecrating for the purpose of stealing goods, or cursing or blackmailing others. Therefore, the rule of leniency reflects an ambivalent position of the Qing government with regard to the occasions of corpse mutilation for rainmaking.

Although educated elites dismissed the belief in the power of a demonic corpse as an example of the simple-mindedness of these villagers, the imperial government itself partially bought the logic. While mutilating someone's dead body was a felony crime that seriously offended the dead's sanctity, because of this moral implication associated with this act, bodily mutilation was used to punish political criminals. For instance, the Ming government desecrated the graves of the ancestors of Li Zicheng – a rebel leader who rose against the Ming dynasty – in

[65] *Xingke tiben*, 2-1-7-14387-3.

order to weaken Li's rebel army. Daniel McMahon sees this as a kind of military strategy, i.e., the "fengshui-attack," which aimed to "create a geomantic positioning that weakened the opponents."[66] Conceivably, the gist of this measure was to dissipate the disturbing *qi* of Li Zicheng by destroying his ancestors' bodies. Similarly, the Qing government destroyed the ancestral graves of Wang Lun, the leader of the White Lotus uprising in Shandong in 1774. Here, the Qing government justified such drastic punishment by demonstrating the demonic body of Wang's father, who had been buried for fifty years but had "white hair grown long out of the body, and the face looked as if alive." When they crushed the skull, "fresh blood spurted out." The body was subsequently thrown into fire and burned to ashes.[67] Seen from this perspective, the mutilation of drought-bringing corpses was a localized fight against the public enemy that brought collective suffering and catastrophe at the local level. Locating and destroying the body of a drought demon was an attempt to restore the balance of *yin-yang* natural forces that had been disturbed by the demon's presence.[68]

Our final case of drought demon exorcism reveals how the argument about a *jiangshi* attack worked in favor of the accused, not the accuser. The case happened in 1876 in Anqiu county, Shandong province. Zhang Sitai, the protagonist of this case, was a village resident who died in the spring of 1875. He was subsequently buried in the Zhang family graveyard. A year later, he was rumored to be a drought demon. According to the plea submitted to the provincial court by Zhang Huapeng, one of Zhang Sitai's sons, in the spring of 1876, a group of villagers

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[66] Daniel McMahon, "Geomancy and Walled Fortifications in Late Eighteenth Century China," *The Journal of Military History* 76 (2012): 384.

[67] *Gongzhongdang zouzhe* (National Palace Museum, Taipei), 403029892. On the Wang Lun uprising, see Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1981).

[68] For the rationale of *yin-yang* imbalance that was understood as the cause of drought in late imperial China, see Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, *Dry Spell: State Rainmaking and Local Governance in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 40.

including Zhao Zhongyuan filed a petition to the county yamen, claiming that Zhang Sitai's body became a drought demon. However, the petition was declined. Subsequently, on April 7th, Zhao Zhongyuan and others carried weaponry and marched to Zhang Sitai's grave site. They demolished the grave and set fire to Zhang's body. The next day, Zhang Huapeng filed a suit against these people. The county magistrate investigated the crime scene and arrested Zhao Zhongyuan and Yu Jianlong, while ordering Zhang Huapeng to rebury the body. A month later, however, Zhang Sitai's grave was desecrated once again. This time, Zhang Huaxin, Zhang Huapeng's older brother, filed a plea to the prefectural court accusing several yamen runners of intervening in the processing of the case in favor of Zhao Zhongyuan upon accepting a bribe from Zhao. Furthermore, Zhang Huapeng claimed that the injustice wrought to his deceased father snowballed into the misfortune of his living family members as well. Zhang Huaxin and Lady Liu (Zhang Huapeng's aunt) died of frustration; the gang of Zhao blackmailed Zhang Huapeng's mother not to pursue the case anymore. Thus, in Zhang Huapeng's narrative, Zhao Zhongyuan, after his failed attempt to insult Zhang Sitai, viciously harassed his family to work off a grudge.

In the end, however, Zhang Huapeng not only lost the case but also was sentenced to 80 strokes of the heavy bamboo for "doing that which ought not to be done." The provincial judge did not accept Zhang's argument and rejected every point Zhang made in his plea. The governor-general determined that Zhang Huapeng's accusation was the product of overreaction and paranoia in response to the villagers' antagonism against his father's corpse. Other charges the Zhang bothers raised against the Zhao gang, such as bribery and blackmailing, were all the product of the "imagined" grudge of Zhao. The primary reason for this decision was that there was no evidence of grave desecration - at least as Zhang Huapeng claimed. According to the

governor-general, Zhang Sitai's grave was damaged a bit, not by Zhao Zhongyuan or others but by a group of hunters. On April 7th, Wu Shihu's group was passing by near Zhang Sitai's grave at night and found a hole on the corner of Zhang's grave mound. They suspected that a fox was inside and decided to smoke through the hole to drive out the fox. Amid setting a fire near the grave mound, a fire spread into the hole and burned the coffin wood. Wu Sihu and others fled out of fear. Later, Zhang Huapeng heard about the damage to the grave and suspected that Zhao Zhongyuan did this to destroy his father's corpse.

In addition, the governor-general elaborated on how the rumor of Zhang Huapeng came into being. Around March 1867, villagers living near the Zhang family graveyard witnessed mysterious lights that appeared on top of Zhang Sitai's grave, which frightened people. Soon, an epidemic swept the village, along with a rumor that the catastrophe was caused by the terror of those who witnessed the strange lights that appeared on Zhang Sitai's grave. Zhao Zhongyuan, a village elder who was living in a neighboring village and "had no acquaintance" with the Zhang family, accompanied by Wang Zuoliang and Xing Zhongjie (who were both dwelling in neighboring counties and were "simple-minded village folks"), went to ask Zhang Huapeng to move the grave in order to "remove foul *qi* would disappear." As Zhang Huapeng declined, Zhao Zhongyuan and others filed a suit in the county court, which was rejected.

This story about the strange lights did not appear in Zhang Huapeng's plea to the provincial court. While it is uncertain whether Zhang Huapeng knew about the lights, it appears that the governor-general possibly heard this story from the accused and recounted it in his crime report. Why was this story worth telling in the report? I think the story makes the rumor of drought demon more credible, for it proves that the fear of the villagers during the time of epidemics was "real." The lights were conceivably the so-called "ghost light" (*guilin*). According

to Fang Yizhi, a late-Ming naturalist, ghost light was generated by the transformation of blood's *qi* that had long stained on the ground. The *qi* of the blood would remain on the ground after the blood itself disappears; and it would glow when it meets with *qi* of a greasy nature, such as that of a corpse. This is why such lights frequently appeared on gravesites.[69] Thus, it was a natural phenomenon that did not have anything to do with a demon or specter. Nevertheless, the appearance of such lights was often perceived as a bad omen. For instance, according to the 1880 gazetteer of Haiyang county (located in the eastern part of Shandong), people determined the location of a drought demon by tracing the ghost light: "people draw a candle light on top of a grave mound. If a faint light appears in response to it, then there is the drought demon inside." The compiler of the gazetteer repudiates this by saying that the light is produced when there are human and animal blood stains on the soil for a long time. Thus, the light normally appears on the field such as battle places and communal burial sites, that is, where numerous dead bodies were disposed of.[70] In the view of the gazetteer compiler, the ghost light is a natural product of the blood's transformation, not an omen or a ghost; but people who do not understand this knowledge would be confused and fearful.

Thus, the lights people observed from Zhang Sitai's grave could have been mere misperception. However, by reporting this event in detail, the governor-general is using people's misperception as evidence of the collective fear and anxiety over an imminent catastrophe. Furthermore, according to the Republican-era gazetteer of Anqiu, where the 1876 case took place, natural disasters and drought did occur in the county in 1875 and 1876: there were "huge winds" and drought in the fall, and as a result half of the grain crop was lost, beans did not ripen, and half of the wheat spouts died. The natural disaster continued in the following year as well,

[69] Fang Yizhi, *Wuli xiaoshi* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), 2: 41-2.

[70] *Haiyang xian xuzhi* (1880), 9: 60.

when there was no rain in the spring and no wheat in the summer; and people suffered from famine and drought.[71]

Thus, the rumor concerning Zhang Sitai nicely accords with time when drought, crop failure, and famine struck Anqiu county, and the mysterious lights and the foul *qi* generated around Zhang Sitai's grave would have been a clear omen in the eyes of the villagers. The governor-general may have interpreted this as simple superstition on the part of the villagers, but fully apprehending their version of the story regarding the demonic corpse was crucial for determining the nature of the case. Of course, the governor-general's verdict does not tell the "truth" of this case. Determining that real desecration never occurred, the governor-general would have likely seen the Zhang family as one of the local folks who were inclined to filling lawsuits in order to achieve their ends. Whether it was true or not, the value of this case – and other similar cases – lies in showing how the fear of demonized dead bodies was politicized at a time of collective suffering and became a powerful tool through which the locals articulated their fear, anxiety, and discontent.[72]

V. Conclusion: The Anxiety of Living with the Dead

Keeping people in the right place was one of the paramount concerns for the Qing empire in the eighteenth century. Being in the right place was important not only for the living but also for the dead. The trope of zombies reveals how various constituents of Qing society imagined the consequence when they failed to keep the dead in the proper place. These predatory corpses were the monstrous counterpart to gods, deities, and ancestors, which represented the afterlife of the

[71] *Xu Anqiu xinzhi* (1920), 1: 3.
[72] Source materials for this case include February 8, 1879 *Shenbao;* January 27, 1880 *Shenbao*; *Junjichu quanzong* (The First Historical Archives, Beijing), 03-7300-063, 03-7300-064.

dead when they were transferred to the proper place. Being homeless, these corpses were deprived of any normal social relationships – that is, the family that offered care and sacrifices. Nor did they possess a physical home – that is, a grave they could rest in peace permanently.

The fear of the living dead brought multiple social actors of the Qing into interactions. The writer-compilers of strange accounts collected, demonstrated, and reproduced widely-shared narratives of *jiangshi*, while reinterpreting the narratives based on moral and intellectual standards of the time. Zombies emerged out of a dystopian world created through a major literary discourse of the mid-Qing, in which demons, ghosts, and non-human species constantly encroached into the human realm. In this world, the living literally cohabited with the dead, for one may encounter a dead body in a coffin, on the street, in someone else's house, in the middle of a forest, or near an old graveyard. In describing this experience, these elite writers actively engaged in what they perceived as the popular cult of death and how ordinary life experience was influenced by the presence of dead bodies. And this anxiety of living with the dead was not without basis. People did encounter unburied bodies or coffins in real life on the regular basis, as will be discussed in following chapters. Indeed, the dead's curse articulated on its demonic body was such a compelling notion that it was incorporated into the existing customs of rainmaking exorcism in North China. These occasions further let us to see how the folk fear of ominous corpses linked ordinary villagers to the top echelon of the empire, i.e., the emperor, law makers, and imperial administrators.

Therefore, what emerges from the above analysis is a broad-based social critique of exposed dead bodies that epitomized a breakdown of social norms. In the narrative of zombies, the position of the dead significantly diverged from the usual assumption on the relationship between the living and the dead in Chinese society. The dead's transformation into zombies

completely denies the principle of reciprocity – the notion that the living must fulfill their moral responsibility to the dead. Qing zombies represented the dead who were ousted from the proper family-based order, something that had to be eliminated. These narratives assert that not everyone could accomplish success in the afterlife by transforming to a respected ancestor, and that those who failed to do so had no way to claim respect and decency. By the eighteenth century, when Qing society became highly competitive and stratified, the dead were no freer than were the living from the stress and pressure of status degeneration and marginalization.

CHAPTER 2: The Fragile Resting Place

Contesting the Value of Graves in the High Qing

I. Introduction: The Myth of Proper Burial

The previous chapter demonstrated that the eighteenth-century tales of living corpses depicted unburied dead bodies as man-hunting zombies. In these tales, the homeless nature of these corpses was clearly demonstrated in the description these bodies were abandoned by the family and alienated from the place where they were supposed to rest. The narrative of zombies further shed lights on the broadly-shared anxiety about the marginalized dead and the possible harm caused by them.

This chapter brings the homeless dead to the center of Qing imperial discourse in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Qing imperial discourse, unburied dead bodies marked a crisis of the ethical foundation of the empire in the so-called High Qing – a period of aggressive imperial expansion, bureaucratic rationalization, and economic prosperity, coupled with population growth, land shortage, and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The imperial discomfort with these bodies climaxed in the eighteenth century as the Qing government increasingly saw these bodies as victims of the mounting socioeconomic pressures and degenerate popular customs. I first briefly investigate the pre-Qing intellectual foundations of the ideology of proper burial that originated from neo-Confucian scholarship in the Song. I then move on to show how the Qing imperial government adopted and promoted proper burial through law and imperial policies in the eighteenth century. Lastly, utilizing a number of court

cases reported to the Board of Punishment in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I reveal the obstacles people had to face in carrying out burial.

The ideologized stance on unburied dead bodies originated from the Song, when a group of neo-Confucian scholar-officials promoted "proper rituals" to expand their influence. Neo-Confucians perceived unburied bodies as a product of problematic popular burial customs; in their minds, the only way to solve the problem was to rectify the customs by reforming popular death rituals. In doing so, they redefined the meaning of the dead's home – that is, the grave – as a space that could protect the bodily sanctity of the dead.

The ritual propriety aggressively asserted by neo-Confucians provided the basic framework through which scholar-officials serving the succeeding dynasties approached the issue of unburied dead bodies. The Qing government in particular adopted this assertion and further codified it in the imperial law, criminalizing a number of "heterodox" practices of disposing of dead bodies. The assumption underlying these legal attempts was that the proper disposal of the dead would be instrumental in restoring social order. As a primary mark of filial devotion, proper burial would ensure the harmonious relationship-building between the living and deceased family members. At the same time, it meant that each member of society should conform to the burial ritual suitable for his or her social standing. Thus, the law found it immoral – or, unlawful – when the ritual performance was inconsistent with the one prescribed for the status group to which one belonged. Resorting to improper burial was to commit a sin against one's ancestor for the sake of one's own status advancement. In other words, the ideology of proper burial was built on the basis not only of distinguishing proper and improper rites but also of reinforcing the class boundary between rich and poor.

The problem with this approach was that, by the eighteenth century, social status was far from stable. Numerous families were experiencing changes in their position in the social hierarchy, as they took part in the growing market economy of the High Qing. In the context of increasing competition over land and productivity, a grave was a valuable property for the management of household resources. Aside from being the dead's home, a grave was a disposable asset for the living family members – something they would willingly capitalize on to boost their livelihood. In occasions of customary buying and selling of graveyards, the bodily sanctity of the dead was often compromised because of the high property value attached to the dead's home.

Overall, in Qing imperial discourse, the homeless dead represented the shameful side effect of the rapidly expanding economy and society of the High Qing. Dealing with these bodies required the Qing government to engage in the broader social issues that produced these bodies in the first place. The ambitious legal steps to criminalize "illicit" burial customs may point to the active state interventionism and optimism of the eighteenth century, although most of these attempts were followed by frustration with the limits of these measures in fundamentally resolving the problem – which reveals a clear discrepancy between the ideological and the market values of the dead's home.

II. The Dead's Home: Where the Bodily Soul Resides

The dead's resting place was more than a physical abode that kept the dead's remains. While specific practices and techniques of grave-building changed over time, one of the key notions that dictated the overarching understanding of the grave in China was that the grave was a dwelling place of the dead's soul. The purpose of interment was to settle the *po*-soul in its

resting place, and from then on, a special tie between the body and the space of burial was created. De Groot asserted the importance of a grave as follows:

> [The grave] is sacred especially as an abode of the soul, not only indispensable for its happiness, but also for its existence, for no disembodied spirit can long escape destruction unless the body coexists with it to serve it as a natural support. Both the body and the soul require a grave for their preservation. Hence the grave, being the chief shelter of the soul, virtually becomes the principal altar dedicated to it and to its worship.[1]

The close association between the soul and the burial space produced a distinct set of cultural practices with regard to interment. Archeological findings suggest that, in the ancient period, the tomb was envisioned as the postmortem house of the dead. Decorated with several elements of contemporary homes, such as household utensils, paintings, furniture, and a house-like architecture, the tomb was the place where the dead led a postmortem life.[2] A number of grave-related practices that emerged and proliferated in the late imperial period suggest that the dead's home was envisioned as the space that crucially integrated the deceased into the family materially, ritually, and philosophically. The most conspicuous example is the emergence of grave rituals in the Song. The grave became a central site of ancestor worship as it provided a collective space where family members gathered, socialized, and commemorated the communal ancestor. For this reason, Patricia Ebrey argues that grave rituals were instrumental in the rise of descent group organizations in the Song, for the grave provided a physical locus where "group consciousness among local agnates" developed. The collectivity projected onto the grave is well illustrated in *A Diagram of Descent Group Burial* (*zuzangtu* 族葬圖) produced by a certain Zhao Zhiming in the thirteenth century. It provides a visual guide to arranging a communal grave for a

[1] De Groot, *The Religious System of China,* 855.

[2] Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 63-84.

descent group, modeled on the arrangement of tablets in an ancestral hall.[3] According to Ebrey, this arrangement "de-emphasizes separate lines of descent [while] stress[ing] the unity of the group and its common origin," which presumably made it convenient for agnates to get together to offer sacrifices.[4] Thus, as the grave rituals were incorporated into the practice of descent group ancestor worship, the grave became a site where families participated in building group solidarity.

Archeological findings from the Song also indicate the increasing incorporation of the grave into family rituals. The grave-building practice in the Song was profoundly influenced by the reorganization of the elite group, i.e., the division between the literati who acquired elite status based on education and bureaucratic achievement and the non-literati local elite whose status was built on wealth, such as affluent farmers and merchants. These two groups developed different types of tomb structure: while the educated literati subscribed to a simple grave, some of rich landowners and non-official families continued the Tang-dynasty style tomb-building, that is, a single chamber tomb with an architectural wall structure ornamented with wall paintings and reliefs.[5] In her examination of tomb portraits and genealogical records found in the tombs of Song-period local elites, Jeehee Hong observes the synthesis of official and non-official practices centered on creating collective ancestors. In other words, both literati and non-official

[3] That is, the tomb of the first ancestor was to be placed in the center, with subsequent ancestors of the *zhao* ranks (the even numbers in generational order) placed on the east and those of the *mu* ranks (the odd numbers in generational order) placed on the west.

[4] Patricia Ebrey, "The Early Stage in the Development of Descent Group Organization," in *Kinship organization in late imperial China*, eds. Patricia Ebrey and James Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 27-8. The diagram appears to have been popularly cited for the purpose of discussing rituals by scholars of late years. De Groot also mentions the diagram in his ethnography, saying that the current editions of the *Rituals for Family Life* (Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*) generally contain the diagram as an appendix. De Groot, *The Religious System of China,* 832.

[5] Dieter Kuhn, "Religion in the Light of Archaeology and Burial Practices," in *Modern Chinese Religion*, eds. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone (Leiden: Brill, 2015), vol.1, 451-547.

elites in the Song created distinct tomb-based rites designed to consolidate family identity and continuity.[6]

Implicit in these practices is the notion that the place of burial was a crucial mediator that connected the dead to the surviving family. The burial place was an exclusive space allocated for the deceased, and good maintenance of the space was crucial for both the deceased and the living family members. Such an understanding was possibly behind the practice of burying celestial land deeds – called Earth God contracts (*maidiquan* 買地權) – in a tomb, a practice that existed from the medieval era up until the twentieth century. The contract was designed to "protect the claims of the dead to their graves by giving them title they can show in the courts of the underworld."[7] Tristan Brown recently discovered that similar contracts were used in Sichuan during the late nineteenth century, either burned or buried along with the body. According to Brown, it "laid out the dimensions of the property acquired from Earth God in geomantic terms," by which the location of the deceased's postmortem property was reported to Earth God.[8] The effect was to proclaim that the land belonged to the deceased, and thus to firmly attach the territoriality of the grave to the deceased.

This practice is in line with another very prominent grave-related activity, geomancy. This term denotes a set of techniques that were used to determine the auspicious place and date of burial. A prevalent practice throughout the early modern era, people in twenty-first century Hong Kong and Taiwan still use the techniques. According to geomantic theories, the fate of the living was inextricably linked to the fate of the dead mediated by the quality of the burial space.

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[6] Jeehee Hong, "Changing Roles of the Tomb Portrait: Burial Practices and Ancestor Worship of the Non-Literati Elite in North China (1000-1400)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 44 (2014): 203-264.
[7] Valerie Hansen, "Why Bury Contracts in Tombs?" *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 64.

[8] Tristan Brown, "The Deeds of the Dead in the Court of the Living: Grave in Qing Law," *Late Imperial China* 39 (2018): 119.

The quality of the burial site was determined by a complicated interplay between different elements of the natural environment surrounding the grave, namely, wind, water, hills, and ridges. The ancestor's body – particularly the bones – buried in a good location would absorb the auspicious force produced from the burial site and further transmit it to descendants. In this way, it was believed that the postmortem welfare of the dead would lead to the prosperity of the living. It was crucial to identify the "right" location where these elements all came together harmoniously.[9]

Some of the popular techniques involved examining the terrain or the quality of the soil. For instance, one of the methods widely used in southern China included testing the quality of the soil by burying a multicolored silk in the ground and checking whether the colors changed or not. A geomancy manual produced in the Song, *Secret Burial Classic*, warned that burying the dead in the wrong spots of a hill or ridge would bring disasters to the family member. Those warnings included detailed instructions on how to avoid bad locations, such as "those who cover the dragon's head or bury in its horns will be destroyed within three years. Those who cover the dragon's eyes or bury in its pupils will have a son kill his father or a younger brother kill his older brother...Those who cover the dragon's waist or bury in its cheeks will have a son or grandson pass first in the examinations…"[10] It appears that different theories and techniques proliferated depending on the locality, while their complexity made it essential for people to rely on the expertise of geomancers. In the Song, it was commonplace that geomancers were deeply involved not only in locating the auspicious grave site but in the general funeral and burial

[9] De Groot, *The Religious System*, 935-1056; Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: The Athlone Press, 1966), 118-154; Ebrey,"The response of the Sung state,", 215-222; Rubie Watson, "Remembering the Dead: Graves and Politics in Southeastern China," in *Death Rituals in Late Imperial,* 203-227.

[10] Ebrey, "The response of the Sung state," 216.

sequence, such as determining "the time the *sha* had to be avoided, how deep the grave should be, and the types and arrangement of grave goods."[11] A modern Taiwanese folk tale, *A Strange Tale of the Geomancy Master, Lin Demigod*, even describes the geomancer as a semi-divine being who works as a "conduit through which the *qi* connecting heaven and earth passes as it effects the changes which humans perceive as events."[12] While the assessment of geomancers in the Qing was not necessarily as generous as this – as will be discussed below – the story may capture the popular sentiments about the role of geomancer, that is, the person who specialized in the events that could crucially determine the family's fate.

The popularity of geomancy often led the family to excavate the body from an original place of burial and rebury the bones at a spot that was believed to bring better luck. In the southern parts of China, in particular, it was common to dispose of the body on a temporary site until the flesh completely disintegrated, put the bones in an urn, and bury it in a permanent resting place. Normally referred to as secondary or double burial, this practice of burying the dead has been understood as a distinct southern Chinese practice associated with the fear of pollution produced from inauspicious interment.[13] James Watson stressed, in particular, the centrality of the bones – cleansed of decomposing flesh and buried in an auspicious site – in bringing benefits to living descendants and thus building a reciprocal relationship with the family.[14] Patricia Ebrey further affirmed that such emphasis on the bones existed in the Song period. In case the body was cremated, burying the bones in a grave was still preferred to

[11] Ebrey, "The response of the Sung state," 215.

[12] Gary Seaman, "Only Half-way to Godhead: The Chinese Geomancer as Alchemist and Cosmic Pivot," *Asian Folklore Studies* 45 (1986): 6.

[13] De Groot, *The Religious System*, 1057-1071; Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," 155-186.

[14] Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," 155-186.

scattering the ashes.[15] In other words, whether the whole body or bones, burying the physical remains of the dead created a distinctly spatialized pattern of interactions between living and deceased family members through which the position of the deceased was redefined within the family.

Most of the above practices were prevalent throughout the early modern period – and even in the twentieth century. That being said, I do not mean to present an ahistorical image of popular death rituals; there were certainly temporal and regional variations that deserve more in-depth investigation.[16] Here, I want to stress that, by the beginning of the early modern period, the dead's resting place was firmly entangled with the notion of familial continuity and prosperity, making the grave a site of great political, social, and cultural importance. The rest of the chapter discusses how people further debated and constructed the meanings attached to the dead's home.

III. Moralizing Burial in Neo-Confucian Discourse

The proliferation of diverse death rituals in the Song was accompanied by the movement to control these practices under the orthodox rites of funeral and burial. Neo-Confucians who emerged as the dominant cultural-intellectual group in the Song stood at the front of this movement. Neo-Confucians refer to a group of scholars who reinterpreted Confucian philosophy in order to reform popular society and culture that they thought had been contaminated by vulgar and alien elements.[17] While their reform programs encompassed a wide range of popular

[15] Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," 416.

[16] Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites," 16-17; Naquin, "Funerals in North China," 46-66.

[17] Several scholars have seen that neo-Confucianism rose in concordance with the so-called localist turn of the elite during the twelve century. Peter Bol explains this turn happened when "bureaucratic families, no longer believing in the likelihood of continued government service for their descendants, realized that their futures would depend on a secure local base and shift from bureaucratic alliance to local alliance

practices, popular death rituals – particularly Buddhist rites and geomancy – constituted the core of the "illicit" or "vulgar" customs that required reform. In their attempts to eliminate these practices, neo-Confucians aggressively asserted "proper burial" as the most basic obligation of the living to the deceased family member, the essence of which was to protect the bodily sanctity of the dead. In so doing, they reinterpreted the meaning of the home, that is, a comfortable physical environment equipped with proper materials and building techniques. In a sense, neo-Confucians reinforced the centrality of the dead's home in understanding the afterlife and the relationship between the living and the dead.

The gist of the neo-Confucian argument of proper burial was that burial must be arranged in a way that fulfilled its basic function, that is, to hide the body in a grave. Sima Guang, a prominent scholar-official of the Song, clarified this point in the opening passage of his famous essay, "On burial":

> Burial is hiding away. A filial son cannot bear to let the parent's body be exposed, which is why the body is wrapped and hidden. There is no need to place lavish grave goods because those would only cause harm, not good. This is what ancient texts discuss about burial…[18]

Quoting from an ancient classic, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (The Spring and Autumn of Lü Buwei), Sima Guang asserts that burying the body of the deceased parent is a natural act of filial piety: leaving the dead body exposed is an inhumane way of treating the dead, which a filial

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building through intermarriage with other leading local families." Peter Bol, "The "Localist Turn" and "Local Identity" in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 24 (2003): 4-5. Known scholarship on this issue includes Robert Hyme, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960-1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[18] Sima Guang, *Sima Wengong Wenji* (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1968), 13: 12.

son would not dare to do.[19] Not letting the body exposed epitomized ritual propriety, which was a natural outgrowth of the humane feeling toward the dead. This passage was subsequently copied and reproduced in numerous writings of neo-Confucian scholars.

In neo-Confucian eyes, any death rituals that went against this principle were deemed inappropriate. Cremation and delayed burial were especially problematic. Several neo-Confucians found these practices problematic because the descendant, enchanted by "heterodox" ideas about death and afterlife, would willingly sacrifice the bodily sanctity of the dead ancestor. The proliferation of cremation, for instance, was a sign of cultural contamination by Buddhist, or "barbarous," customs of death.[20] The theology of rebirth and transmigration gave rise to a popular tendency that overlooked the most fundamental duty to the dead; instead, people would burn the body of their deceased family members, which to neo-Confucians was equivalent to the postmortem mutilation of a corpse. Neo-Confucians further attacked delayed burial in a similar manner. Deceived by the crooked tricks of geomancers, people would leave coffins in a temple or a distant place, virtually abandoning the dead. Furthermore, descendants would forget the location of the coffin as they grew old and declined, which would cause the dead to be left unburied and lost permanently. The vice of this practice was particularly deplorable because descendants would use the body of deceased ancestors in order to acquire wealth and fortune through geomancy. Therefore, these "problematic" death rites embodied both heterodoxy and immorality.[21]

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[19] *Lüshi chuqiu* (Guilin: Guangxu Normal University Press, 2005), 320.

[20] One of the neo-Confucian attack on Buddhist-inspired death practices hinged on the fact that Buddhism was a foreign, imported religion. See Ebrey, "The Response of the Sung State," 212-214.

[21] Patricia Ebrey, "Sung Neo-Confucian Views on Geomancy," in *Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought*, eds. by Irene Bloom and Joshua Fogel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 79-86; Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals*

For neo-Confucians, the correct way to bury the dead was to refrain from all these unnecessary and incorrect formalities and vanity and instead focus on making a comfortable home for the dead. First and foremost, interment had to be done without delay. Furthermore, the dead's home, a grave, had to be a sacred space that could ensure the physical welfare of the dead, where the dead could rest in peace and slowly wither away. The ideal home of the dead was a grave firmly built underground, completely enclosed and sealed, thus protecting the body from any harmful influences from the outside. The body should be an object that deserves careful and sincere protection. In order to promote proper burial, some leading neo-Confucians provided practical advice on the burial method that could best protect the bodily sanctity of the dead. A good example is *Family Rituals*, a ritual guidebook produced by the authoritative neo-Confucian scholar in the Song, Zhu Xi. *Family Rituals* became the most popular reference work on the proper performance of the four rituals: capping, wedding, funeral, and ancestral rite. The funeral section in *Family Rituals* provides a complete ritual sequence ranging from the preparation for mourning to the post-burial sacrifice offering, as well as a technical guideline to building a grave. Popularly known as "white cloud burial" (*baiyunzang* 白雲葬), it prescribes using cement made of a mixture of lime, fine sand, and yellow earth. The gist of this method was to make the grave sturdy and waterproof, for the cement would "become as strong as metal or stone; neither ants nor robbers will be able to enter."[22] Cheng Yi, a prominent Song neo-Confucian active in the eleventh century, was interested in manufacturing a durable coffin that could delay

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in the Cultural Exchange Between China and Europe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 18-20.

[22] Patricia Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 107-8.

decomposition.[23] These techniques commonly aimed to build a sturdy grave and prevent the body from being exposed, thereby materializing the ethics of proper burial.

Efforts to reform popular customs by propagating correct burial methods continued and took more concrete shape in the late Ming and early Qing. Timothy Brook found a clear trend of increasing references to *Family Rituals* in local gazetteers produced in the Jiangnan area throughout the seventeenth century. Brook further observes that the rise of *Family Rituals* as an orthodox ritual guide occurred hand in hand with the emergence of the agnatic lineage in Jiangnan as a localized elite organization. In other words, performing the "correct" funerals as indicated in *Family Rituals* was instrumental in claiming the rightful leadership status of local elite lineages. Michael Szonyi also observes that *Family Rituals* became a conspicuous reference in the organization of patrilineal lineages (particularly, the spread of ancestral halls) in Fuzhou during the Ming and Qing periods.[24] In Zhejiang province, the southern reaches of Jiangnan, a group of local elites attempted to further research and disseminate proper burial methods by producing their own burial manuals (*zangshu* 葬書), such as Wang Wenlu's *Zangdu* 葬度, Chen Que's *Zangshu* 葬書, and Fan Kun's *Shushan zangshu* 蜀山葬書 – all of which were presumably produced in the seventeenth century. These burial experts attempted to propagate and further develop *baiyunzang* by introducing the detailed procedure of manufacturing the cement compound and building a sturdy chamber that was suitable for the watery Jiangnan soil.[25]

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[23] Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90.

[24] Timothy Brooks, "Family Ritual and the Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49 (1989): 465-499; Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 90-137.

[25] For the details of these manuals, see Zhang Zhuanyong, "Yintu chengsu: Mingqing jiangnan diqu de ziran dili huanjing yu zangsu," *Zhongguo shehui lishi pinglun* 9 (2008): 258-283.

Publishing these texts and disseminating the knowledge of correct burial methods were part of the localized efforts to reform burial customs in Jiangnan during the seventeenth century.[26]

A question is how far these elite experts and reformers succeeded in exerting their influence. Several scholars have discussed the social ramifications of the reform programs put forth by neo-Confucians. One common observation is that the neo-Confucian stress on ritual propriety was a response to the increasing blurring of status boundaries in the context where the old sumptuary law on ancestral rites lost its regulatory power. As Rawski asserts, "the mourning observances for an emperor were in their essentials the same as the mourning observances for commoners."[27] Pursuing proper rites was how neo-Confucians claimed their superior social position, superiority determined not by wealth and consumption but by leading the correct way of life. In so doing, neo-Confucian reformers urged their cohorts – the elite echelon in local society – to conform to what they thought of as the right marker of social status. As Ebrey remarks, while the criticism was often framed "in terms of what commoners should cease doing," it was also a reflection of the anxiety toward the "intrusion of popular practices into the ritual behavior of the educated and insecurity about the ability of the educated to demonstrate their cultural superiority."[28]

That being said, the "proper" burial methods they promoted were never humble or cheap. To be sure, the most immediate audience of these manuals were the local elite who could understand and appreciate the knowledge that combined the orthodox philosophies and techniques related to burial. Furthermore, fulfilling what was prescribed in the manuals required

[26] Some of these burial experts were involved in organizing burial societies (*zangshe* 葬社), the locally-rooted organizations designed to promote proper burial. See He Shuyi, "Yili huasu: wanming shishen de sangsu gaige sixiang ji qi shijian," *Xin shixue* 12 (2000): 93-95; Angela Leung (Liang Qizi), *Shishan yu jiaohua: Mingqing de cishan zuzhi* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 204-210.

[27] Rawski, "A Historian's Approach," 32. Also see Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals*, 18-9.

[28] Ebrey, *Confuciansim and Family Rituals,* 77.

the family to arrange high-quality materials and a big crew of laborers hired for several days. Building a good grave was a work of art, technique, and material consumption. In other words, the example of proper burial demonstrated in the manuals was certainly for the well-off. However, it did not prevent burial experts from reaching to the less fortunate folks. For instance, Chen Que put two diagrams in his manual depicting "the burial of the rich" (*fuzang* 富葬) and "the burial of the poor" (*pinzang* 貧葬). The difference between the two is the degree of lavishness, while both methods commonly strive to hide the body deep underground: for the rich, a coffin would be buried 3 *chi* below the ground in a chamber built with 4-*chi* thick of walls made of cement; for the poor, a coffin would be placed 3 *chi* below the ground in an empty pit without any chamber.[29] Through the diagrams, Chen Que ask people to strive from their respective positions to fulfill the bodily sanctity of the dead, the highest value one must try to achieve though burial – regardless of how lavish the grave would be. Doing so would not improve the economic standing of the poor, but instead would lead them to "conform to the right way of life.

[29] Chen Que, *Chenshi Zangshu* (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 1994), 9969-9971.

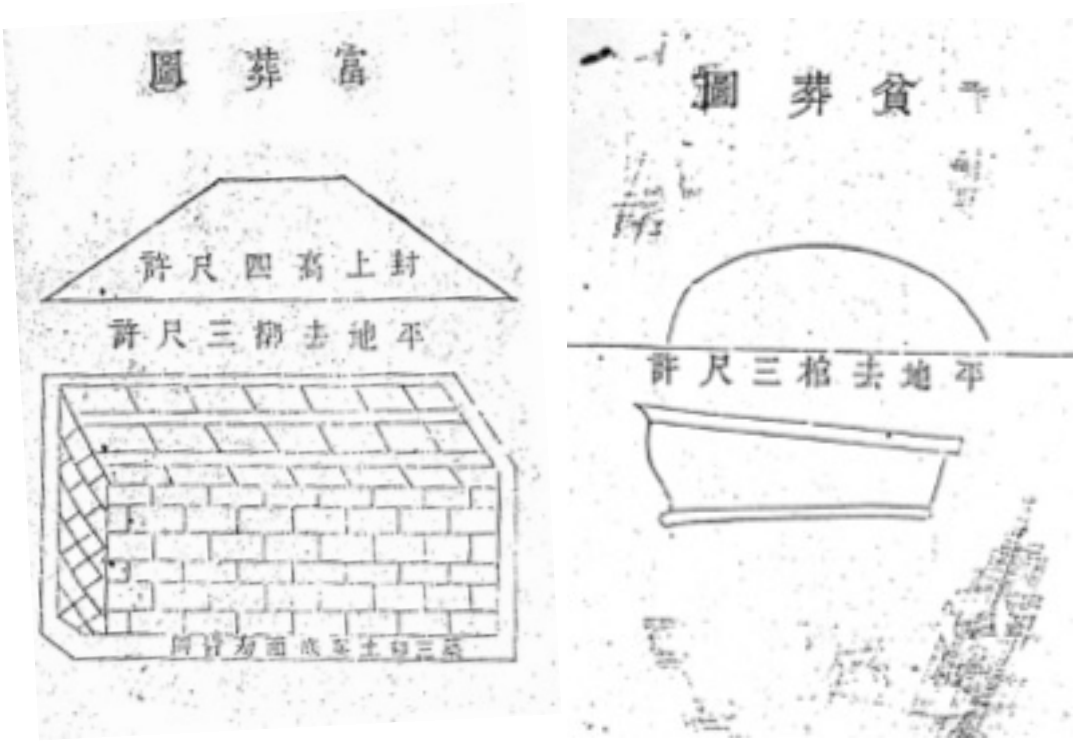

Image 2. Chen Que's diagrams of proper burial for the rich (left) and the poor (right)

In sum, the thrust of the neo-Confucian endeavor was to create an "orthodox" definition of the dead's home that was in accordance with Confucian moral precepts of filial piety and ritual propriety. In so doing, they created a new status-based standard for proper burial.

IV. The Qing Regulation of Burial Customs

Neo-Confucian endeavors to promote proper burial were far from a private enterprise. Beginning in the Song and culminating in the Qing, their opinions on the problematic death cults made it into a set of imperial law and policies through which cremation and delayed burial were made punishable crimes. Following the neo-Confucian conviction that the proliferation of illicit burial practices was an outcome of vulgar popular customs, the imperial law declared that the

failure to provide proper burial to the deceased family members was to abandon one's humane duty toward the dead. By doing so, the imperial law invoked the bodily sanctity of the dead as a universal principle that must govern burial rituals. This, however, does not indicate an outright attempt to standardize burial practices. The law was sensitive about the increasing social stratification and its impact on the corruption of burial custom. Particularly in the eighteenth century, the imperial government had to engage in an intense debate on how far the universal principle of proper burial should exert a regulatory power. Here, the key issue was to set the boundary of the "respectable" family that could reasonably meet the imperial expectations of proper demeanor.

To begin with, the practice of cremation had been prohibited by law from the Song dynasty on. An imperial edict issued in 962 prohibited the burning of coffins disposed outside of the capital, with exceptions granted for Buddhist monks and nuns, foreigners, and those needing to return the body for burial.[30] The law declared that cremation was not a standard way to dispose of the body; it was allowed only for those without a normal family-based life. In the Ming, the law prohibited the performance of both delayed burial and cremation, following the statute on funeral and burial (*sangzanglü* 喪葬律) governed by the Board of Rites (*lilü* 禮律); and the same statute was adopted in Qing law. The statute assigned 80 strokes of the heavy bamboo to those who postponed burial because of the fear aroused by geomancy and placed a coffin in the house without interment for more than a year. Those who cremated a corpse or threw it into water following the wishes of a deceased were punishable by 100 strokes of the heavy bamboo. However, an exception was granted when "death took place in a distant place, and the son or son's son was not able to bring the corpse back [for burial] (*guizang* 歸葬) but

[30] *Song xingtong* (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1999), 18: 9; Ebrey, "Cremation in Sung China," 422-3.

cremate it." In these occasions, the descendant was permitted to "follow his convenience."[31] Therefore, compared to the Song law, the Ming and Qing law applied stricter rules about disposing of the dead. Not only burning the dead but simply leaving the body without burying it was now illegal. Furthermore, cremating the dead was now allowed only in very limited circumstances, namely, when the body was brought back home for burial. Those who died without families or home – such as monks, nuns, and foreigners – had to be buried somehow, instead of being burned.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Qing government further tightened the definition of "inevitable circumstances" by narrowing the scope of the population that could legitimately resort to illicit disposal of the dead. The first group addressed in this process was the banner population.[32] In 1735, Changlu, Investigating Censor of Henan Circuit, submitted a memorial reporting on the widespread practice of cremation among bannermen, asserting that "our Manchu and Mongol bannermen frequently burn the bodies of deceased parents and then collect bones for burial (*jiangu yanmai* 檢骨掩埋)." Changlu condemned that the practice was disturbing and vulgar because the banner population had ancestral graveyards given to them by the imperial government. In other words, they cremated the dead in spite of the fact that they did have a place to bury them; it was not an inevitable cremation but a willful burning of the dead. Changlu further asserted that it was the outcome of "habits becoming a widespread custom" (*xiguan chengsu xiangyan* 習慣成俗相沿), the vulgar custom that spread among the banner population

[31] Yonglin Jiang, *The Mandate of Heaven and The Great Ming Code* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 119; Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 183.

[32] The Eight Banners refer to the military institution organized by the Manchus in the Qing. The banner population, consisted of the Manchus, Mongols, and Han Chinese, were the conquest elites and became hereditary military classes. See Kent Guy, "Who were the Manchus? A Review Essay," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (2002): 157-160.

in the same manner that delayed burial spread among the Han Chinese because of the Chinese pursuit of *fengshui* 風水.[33] This argument likely pleased the Yongzheng emperor. In his edict issued on the same day, Yongzheng built on Changlu's argument and elaborated that cremation was not necessary for the banner population. Unlike the beginning of the dynasty, when warriors had to move incessantly to build and manage garrisons and thus had no choice but to burn their parents' bodies, these days the Eight Banners and Mongols had permanent residency (*ningju* 寧居), with ancestral graveyards at "home" (*xiangtu* 鄉土, that is, Beijing). Thus, since they had a permanent settlement and a designated graveyard, there was no legitimate reason for bannermen to practice cremation.[34]

The above legislation was likely influenced by the Qing ethnic policies that revolved around the issue of burial in the Yongzheng and early Qianlong courts. According to Mark Elliot, the Manchu court created Beijing as the "home," making it the place where all bannermen in local garrisons were supposed to be relocated upon retirement and buried. While this repatriation policy was increasingly called into question because of the impracticality of shipping the whole body all the way from provincial garrisons to Beijing, both the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors insisted on this policy because burial in Beijing was a crucial mark of the "Manchu ways" as well as a means to prevent acculturation of garrison bannermen. Interestingly, as Elliott points out, the denunciation of cremation was paradoxical given the fact that it was an "ancient custom" practiced by the Manchus. Elliot interprets the consistent banning of cremation among garrison bannermen as an attempt to "conceal what [the emperor] considered a distasteful, and possibly embarrassing Manchu practice, left over from the days when they had

[33] *Gongzhongdang Yongzhengchao zouzhe* (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 1997), 25: 299.

[34] *Yongzhengchao Hanwen yuzhi huibian* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1999), 2: 334-335.

been barbarians."[35] Likewise, the above message denies any single possibility of the Manchu root associated with cremation; rather, it was an unambiguous sign of cultural degeneration. The Yongzheng emperor was likely prioritizing the value of burial practice as a hallmark of cultural demeanor required for the ruling elite. This opinion was promulgated in a substatute that was newly attached to the statute of funeral and burial:

> Both bannermen and civilians are not allowed to perform cremation, except for those who live in a distant place and suffer poverty and thus cannot bring the coffin back and need to carry bones back home for burial. Those who violate this would be punished following the rule of "violating the order" (*weizhilü* 違制律). The lineage head and the banner head who cover this up would be punished following the statute of *buyingqinglü*."[36]

Thus, cremation was the means to dispose of the pauper who died far away from the family. Bannermen, being the ruling elite, should not follow what was allowed only for the lower segment of population. The bannermen's burning of deceased parents violated the ritual propriety they were expected to conform to because of their superior status in the imperial social hierarchy.

The Qing court took a similar step regarding the issue of delayed burial practiced among the Han Chinese. Analyzing the reasons for the prevalence of delayed burial, several officials of the Yongzheng and Qianlong courts adopted a similar status-based explanation. For instance, sometime in the Yongzheng reign, Zhang Yuanhuai, Supervising Secretary of the Board of Works, memorialized the emperor on the widespread practice of delayed burial in Zhili, stating that "coffins are left exposed or abandoned in deserted suburban areas. These coffins are

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[35] Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 264. For the similar concern about the contamination of the Manchu ethos by the Han culture in the Qianlong reign, see Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 72-76.

[36] *Yongzhengchao Hanwen yuzhi huibian*, 2: 334-335.

damaged under burning sunlight or cold wind; some of them remain in a desolate temple or inside a crumbling building." He then proceeded to describe the three occasions when burial would be postponed: first, when the family was too destitute to arrange a burial site; second, when those who had a blind faith in geomancy neglected burial while seeking for an auspicious site; and third, when people from other locales without families remained after death in the state of temporary disposal (*fucuo zhanting* 浮厝暫停).[37] In other words, delayed burial occurred in different circumstances: while it was likely an inevitable choice for destitute or migrant people, there were also numerous deluded folks who left coffins unburied because of geomancy. Hu Ying, the lieutenant of Shanxi, made a similar argument in his report on the custom of delayed burial in Hangzhou in 1739.[38] According to Hu, delayed burial was very serious in the city, where "nine out of ten households in Hangzhou delay burial and leave coffins unburied." Hu explained that it was mainly because the area was "overcrowded while the land was cramped," which made people of different economic standing resort to different choices: "those households of the middling bracket (*zhongren zhi jia* 中人之家), enchanted by the talk of geomancy, would not promptly bury the body, while poor households (*pinfa zhi jia* 貧乏之家) [have no choice but to leave coffins unburied because they do] not have the means to bring the body back home."[39] In other words, in a city with high population density, delayed burial was a symptom of the gap between the rich and the poor. The affluent folks normally had land or resources to bury the dead

[37] *Gongzhongdang zouzhe*, 27: 485.

[38] Hu Ying brought up the custom of delayed burial in Hangzhou as part of the imperial policies of poor relief. Referring to the imperial policy of expanding poor relief homes (*yangjiyuan* 養濟院) in each province implemented in the fifth month of the year, Hu Ying shed lights on the two more issues he thought deserved the government interventions: female infanticide in Jiangxi province and delayed burial in Zhejiang province. Hu Ying was familiar with these issues because he served in both provinces as Surveillance Commissioner.

[39] *Gongzhong dang'an* (The First Historical Archives, Beijing), 04-01-01-025-041.

but would not carry out burial in a timely manner, because they hoped for the chance to find a better burial spot or a more auspicious time, while the impoverished did not have any access to land for burying the dead. Again, echoing Changlu's argument, the problem was with the better-off people who willfully abandoned their duty to bury the dead.

The perception that the spread of a disturbing burial custom was partially attributed to affluent folks – the upper echelon in local society, that is, the gentry cohort – troubled a number of Qing officials. For instance, in 1741, Chen Hongmou, a well-known Confucian moralist and statecraft official serving in the post of the provincial judge of Jiangsu, vehemently criticized gentry (*shidafu* 士大夫) in the "southern provinces" – conceivably referring to Jiangnan – as the main culprit that spread the "debased custom" of delayed burial. In order to reform these people, Chen argued that the government should restrain their bureaucratic advancement by introducing a screening process. For those who failed to fulfill the duty of burial by the time of appointment, proceeding to the new post would be suspended until burial was completed. Those who were already in a post without fulfilling the duty of burial should leave the post temporarily until they carried out burial.[40] Three decades later, Ouyang Yongyi, the surveillance commissioner of Jiangxi, picked up this argument and proposed prohibiting an examination candidate from taking a higher-level examination if he did not fulfill the duty of burial within 27 months.[41] In these proposals, the two officials explicitly targeted the "vulgar" folks among the elite cohorts in the upper echelon, by claiming that those people were not qualified to join the path of status advancement unless they fulfilled the basic requirement of being an elite.[42]

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[40] *Gongzhong dang'an*, 04-01-19-7-9. Chen Hongmou was known to be an ardent supporter of orthodox death rituals. For his attitude towards the custom of delayed burial, see Rowe, *Saving the World*, 434-436.

[41] *Gongzhong dang'an*, 04-01-01-0312-005.

[42] Rowe argues that Chen Hongmou's definition of the literati elite – or, the "official elite," as he terms it – was a group with special obligations rather than with special privileges. That is, based on the superior

Conceivably, these proposals were quite radical, which is probably why the Qing court rejected them. The court rejected Chen's proposal on the ground that these measures would "stir up disorder and disturbance in local areas," as corrupt yamen clerks would likely "use this as a pretext for blackmail, threatening to lay a charge against upright officials."[43] Presumably, the court was wary of arousing antagonism among the local gentry cohorts. Instead of taking a radical measure, the Qing court announced another general prohibition:

> From now on, following the new substatute, a household that is either currently observing mourning or has a coffin left unburied for a long time must [arrange burial] within a year. Those with land and finances (*youli youdi* 有力有地) should provide burial in accordance with the ritual. Besides, if one [postponed burial] due to temporary difficulties in arranging a burial site, they are allowed to dispose of the dead temporarily (*quancuo* 權厝) outside of the city. Still, one cannot maintain the state of light burial (*jiuqi qiantu* 久期淺土) for long and would be ordered to arrange land and carry out burial as soon as possible. If one delays burial and leaves a coffin in a house for over a year, he will be subject to punishment by law.[44]

Again, the punishment would follow when the performance did not accord with the economic status. Having land and resources indicated that the family's status was high enough to conform to proper burial. Meanwhile, a family with limited resources should strive to conform to proper burial during a given time. A family's refusal to conform to the regulations by leaving a coffin unburied longer than allowed would be taken as a sign of vulgarity and immorality.

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intelligence and moral commitment acquired through extensive formal education, this group was obliged to offer bureaucratic services to the throne as well as "civilizing guidance" to the masses of people. Therefore, through their personal morality and professional career, they were responsible for the well-being of the people and the empire. Rowe particularly stresses Chen's anxiety about the ruling elite of his time, many of whom Chen thought failed to live up to that obligation. Seen in this light, the gist of the above policy was presumably to punish the moral failure of the lower-rung elite – or, the potential cohort of the ruling elite – who failed to fulfill the most basic moral duty as educated people. Rowe, *Saving the World*, 297-298.

[43] Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146.

[44] Ma Jianshi et al., *Daqing lüli tongkao jiaozhu* (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 1992), 569.

Overall, the gist of the Qing legal approach to illicit burial customs was to guide people to reform themselves. It required people to behave in a way that was commensurate with their socioeconomic standing. It was influenced by the neo-Confucian doctrine that ritual propriety should be the mark of social status. The problem was that Qing society in the eighteenth century was too complicated to understand people in terms of exclusive categorical status groups. In a sense, the Yongzheng legislation that specifically targeted the banner population was rather exceptional because, by the mid eighteenth century, bannermen were nearly the only hereditary status group identifiable in terms of status category that remained valid. The emancipation of several hereditary occupational groups in the 1720s clearly shows the increasing dissolution of boundaries between status groups.[45] Matthew Sommer took this point to further investigate the shifting nature of social mobility in Qing society using the evolution of rape law. Here, Sommer argues that the dissolution of status boundaries was accompanied by the growing stress on chastity that was universally applied to commoner women. In other words, the dissolution of the former status distinction gave rise to a new gender-based standard of proper demeanor that came to function as a mark of commoner status.[46] The evolution of Qing burial regulations presents an interesting contrast to Sommer's finding vis-à-vis the relationship between status and propriety. The burial legislation constantly identified the wrongdoing of these people in the fact that their performance was improper in light of their status defined by their respective socioeconomic standings. In other words, contrasting Sommer's observation of the diminishing importance of

[45] The emancipated groups include the musician households of Shaanxi and Shanxi, the "fallen people" of Zhejiang, the hereditary servants of Huizhou and Ningbo prefectures in Anhui, the Tanka boatmen of coastal Guangdong, and the beggar households of Suzhou. There were still servile statuses called *jianmin*, but the servitude did not necessarily prevent these people from accumulating wealth and power and achieving social advancement. Patricia Ebrey and Evelyn Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Colorado: Boulder University Press, 2013), 117-120.

[46] Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*.

status in the Qing gender order, status was a crucial factor that determined the expectations of proper social behavior vis-à-vis the dead. Being capable of providing timely burial meant that the family should be willing to provide timely burial; their failure to conform to the right behavior – despite having the financial resources to do so – was precisely why these people were criminal.

V. Profiting from the Dead's Resting Place

If burial regulations and policies reveal how the Qing state envisioned to reform burial customs, enforcing those regulations was a completely different issue. It is very difficult to estimate how effective these legal measures were, given that sources are silent on the issue of how thoroughly the rules of punishment were put into practice. I could not locate any record of anyone actually being punished for not burying the dead in a timely manner.[47] Nevertheless, the ideologized criticism against these practices did not subside during the rest of the Qing period. Local administrators regularly referred to the above law codes in their edicts of criticism, prohibition, and punishment of delayed burial and cremation throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[48]

At the same time, legal documents suggest that the state judicial machinery was quite active in another area. The criminal cases reported to the Board of Punishment under the category of uncovering graves contain a rich body of case files pertaining to crimes that violated

[47] This conclusion must remain hypothetical for now. The legal documents I consulted are composed of the Qing code, legal commentaries and handbooks, and the routine memorials reported to the Board of Punishment – which only contains the cases that were grave enough to be discussed in higher-level courts. It is possible the records of punishing those who delayed burial may exist in the lower-level county archives, which I have yet to consult. However, I am doubtful about the possibility of encountering such records because, if the punishment was a usual method of regulating the custom, it would have been recorded in such sources as local gazetteers or magistrates' handbooks or notes. These sources normally contain the edicts of prohibition, but I have yet to see any record of actual punishment.

[48] De Groot, *The Religious System*, 132-135; Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 147.

the bodily sanctity of the dead. The codes under this category attempted to protect the dead's sanctity by criminalizing "mishandling of corpses," such as desecrating a grave, exposing a coffin or a body, damaging or discarding a corpse, and stealing goods from a grave or a coffin.[49] Historians find these cases useful because they present rich contextual information as to when, why, and by whom the unlawful practices pertaining to burial happened. Jeff Snyder-Reinke, for instance, stresses a huge gap between ideal and reality of Qing burial practices, pointing out that a corpse was "always in motion," and thus the ideal of a grave being the permanent resting place was close to a myth.[50] He suggests that the prevalence of these corpse-related crimes reveals less about individual morality than about the problem of complicated social environments surrounding the disposal of dead bodies that could not be fully apprehended by ideals of filial piety or ritual propriety.

For Snyder-Reinke, the increasing reports of illicit disposal of dead bodies through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries allude to the broader social problems of population pressure and land shortage. He goes on to argue that "the very success of the Qing state in increasing its population – long seen as a barometer of good governance in Chinese political culture – was also undermining its ideological and practical control of the grave, as corpses proliferated in the nineteenth century."[51] In other words, the increasing prosecution of cases of mishandling corpses was likely a response to the increasing imbalance between population and arable land. Built upon this argument, this section presents cases that illustrate how vulnerable the dead's home was to the logic of the market economy, by stressing that graves – or, the places where dead bodies were hidden – were frequently perceived as profitable properties. Thus, even

[49] Snyder-Reinke, "Afterlives of the Dead," 4.

[50] Snyder-Reinke, "Afterlives of the Dead," 1-20.

[51] Snyder-Reinke, "Afterlives of the Dead," 18.

if the family did have land to bury the dead, it did not mean that the dead could rest there forever. This further suggests that, despite what was asserted in burial regulations, having land and other resources did not necessarily guarantee timely burial. Status was far from fixed, and thus, a grave was a disposable asset because of the high land value in an increasingly competitive milieu. Just like having a good graveyard functioned as a mark of high status, losing it happened frequently as a family moved downward in the socioeconomic hierarchy. In other words, burying the dead was closely tied to how a family capitalized on the land value of the dead's home. Therefore, these cases reveal the limits of the ideologized efforts of the Qing state to impose the universal duty of proper burial, for arranging and securing the dead's home was a demanding task in the context of intensifying land competition in the eighteenth century.

i. Grave as a Commodity

Without a doubt, land was a valuable property in early modern China in general and in the eighteenth century in particular. Because a grave was a type of property owned and managed by the family of the dead, the quality and longevity of a grave depended greatly on the financial condition of the family. Furthermore, as shown by the zombie tales analyzed in the previous chapter and the imperial burial regulations in the earlier section of this chapter, postponing burial was a common practice in the Qing – if not from earlier periods. We cannot offer a monolithic explanation as for why some people were able to arrange a grave while others were not. One line of explanation might be that arranging the final resting place was often a prolonged process that required the effort of several generations and, more importantly, the investment of collective family assets. Michael Szonyi observes from the Song and Ming records of lineage rituals in Fujian that building an ancestral grave and performing grave rituals was crucial in lineage-

building efforts – particularly at the formative stage. He stresses that the sustenance of a grave was highly dependent on the arrangement of corporate property that could support worship at the grave. In other words, the longevity of the grave was conditional on the financial investment based on the corporate property holding.[52] Rubie Watson further affirms this point in her observation of geomantic practice in South China in the twentieth century, asserting that "deceased's chances of survival are greatly increased if he has left enough property to form an estate in his name." Therefore, "very few [of the ancestral bones kept in the state of temporary burial] achieved the final stage of a marked tomb."[53]

The stability of a grave – and all the activities of ancestor worship that took place surrounding graves, such as grave offering and grave sweeping – depended on the stability of the family's claim to the burial site. A number of scholars have pointed to rapid commercialization and marketization throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, as well as the resulting transformation of the relationship between peasants and land. In particular, the intensifying competition over access to land produced extremely complicated practices of buying and selling of land, along with increasing tensions, disputes, and violence that frequently occurred during the process of land transactions. A graveyard was not exempt from this pattern of land-related tensions. Scholars have discussed this issue using two different approaches: precommercial vs. market logics. For Philip Huang, a graveyard represents the precommercial logic in land transaction, for "land was much more than just a piece of property to be bought and sold…it was what separated him from the sorry lot of the 'homeless' who were forced to drift from place to place, and it embodied the very continuity of his patriline, concretized in the family

[52] Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship,* 121-127.

[53] Watson, "Remembering the Dead," 208-9.

graveyard."[54] In contrast, Thomas Buoye observes far more dramatic incidents that involve disputes over a graveyard in which a family exhumed their own ancestral graveyard in order to sell the land. From a series of homicide cases that included graveyard disputes, Buoye sees, during the eighteenth century, how deeply a graveyard was brought under the market logic and how much this land competition eroded the ideological foundation of the rural economy and disrupted social harmony.[55]

How did this situation influence burial? Although I do not have comprehensive data on transactions involving graves, there are several instances of anecdotal evidence that suggest buying and selling of graves was profoundly influenced by the intensifying competition over land. To begin with, difficulties of buying or obtaining a grave manifested in the form of grave disputes called *daozang* 盗葬 (stealing a spot in a graveyard). For people who could not purchase a suitable gravesite, it was common to occupy a grave illegally, either by disposing of the body in an empty site or by secretly burying the dead in someone else's graveyard. In the latter occasion, one might level out an existing tomb or even excavate an old coffin in order to bury the dead. In the early Qing, Huang Liuhong, in his well-known handbook for local administration, addressed how to handle boundary disputes that involved gravesites, which testifies to the fact that such disputes were common enough to be discussed in the handbook.[56]

The illicit occupation of burial land appears to have been common particularly in the context of migration or new settlement, when landless people took advantage of the absence of

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[54] Philip Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: The Qing and the Republic Compared* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 81.

[55] Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy,* 75, 142, 225. Also see Thomas Buoye, "From Patrimony to Commodity: Changing Concepts of Land and Social Conflicts in Guangdong Province during the Qianlong Reign," *Late Imperial China* 14 (1993): 33-59.

[56] Huang Liuhong, *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence: A Manual for Local Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 446-8.

clear ownership structure. Furthermore, when the illicit occupation of a grave became customary with the passage of time, the government would sometimes turn ambivalent about the illegal nature of this practice. For instance, in Manchuria, the home of the Manchus where the Chinese were prohibited from owning landed property until the late nineteenth century, it was illegal for the Chinese to bury the dead on manor land. However, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Chinese households that obtained the right to cultivate the manor land customarily buried the dead on the land they tilled for several generations under the permission of the bailiff - which constituted an illegal land transaction in principle but happened customarily.[57] This kind of illicit occupation of a grave by a new settler happened frequent enough that the presence of a grave often worked as a proof of legitimate land occupation even when there was no other legitimate evidence of property right, such as land contract and tax payment records. Sometimes, it even worked against the legitimate property owner when the latter claimed the land by "transferring a small part of the land in question to the family whose grave it was, in order to protect the grave."[58]

Often, *daozang* happened in the process of a land transaction, as shown in the Kong family graveyard in Wuhu, Jiangsu. The graveyard was originally bestowed to Kong Long – who was a vice minister of the Board of Works in the Ming – in the Hongzhi era (1487-1505) and had been the burial place for the Kong family for seventeen generations. The Qian family had been taking care of the southern part of the graveyard for several generations and, possibly due to this hereditary occupation, had their own ancestral graves at the southern area outside of the Kong

[57] Christopher Isett, *State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria, 1644-1862* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 102.

[58] Anne Osborne, "Property, Taxes, and State Protection of Rights," in *Contract and Property in Early Modern China: Rational Choice in Political Science*, ed. Madeleine Zelin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 143-145.

family grave. The Qian had buried the dead there for seven generations. No contract remains, but this portion of the land was registered under "the household of Qian Bangting" – presumably, the first Qian who became the grave manager – and the Qian fulfilled the tax responsibilities. In the early Daoguang reign (1820-1850), Qian Jinyun and Qian Weizhong, the brothers who took care of the grave management, sold a portion of the extra land (*yudi* 餘地) located in front of the Qian ancestral graves to He Shunde and Yang Rusong in order to alleviate their tax burden. Upon the transaction, He and Yang arranged graves for their family members on the land they bought and took over the tax responsibilities. However, when the Kong saw a number of "alien" graves near their family graveyard, they took it as an illicit encroachment and sued the Qian for illegally selling their family graveyard. In court, it was decided that the transaction of the extra land was illegal because a portion of this land was in fact included inside the boundaries of the Kong family grave. Thus, although the Qian did not intentionally encroach into the Kong grave, the transaction was determined to be an illicit sale. This case illustrates, first of all, that buying and selling of a burial space took place by slicing an existing graveyard into several ownership, and second, in so doing, grave boundaries were easily breached.[59]

ii. Illicit Customary Transaction of Graveyards

The above instances imply that a graveyard had a highly competitive land value and that, because of this, the ethical value of a grave as a sacred resting place was easily jeopardized. A number of legal devises were designed to protect graves from market-driven encroachment. For instance, a substatute on uncovering graves legislated in 1817 prohibited the leveling of a graveyard in order to sell the land, which was punishable at least by 100 strokes of the heavy

[59] *Neige daku dang'an*, 216463.

bamboo - and the punishment escalated if the offender excavated the body. However, if the family sold the graveyard for economic reasons while retaining the grave and kept offering sacrifices, they were not punished.[60] In other words, while a grave was utilized strategically as a part of household resource management, the law required the family to protect the grave as much as it could.

Besides from the imperial law code, there were customary law that attempted to protect graves. According to *Report on an Investigation of Customs* (*Minshi xiguan diaocha baogaolu* 民事習慣調查報告錄), the outright sale of a graveyard was prohibited customarily in several provinces in North China.[61] The bottom line was that the family could maintain a perpetual claim to a grave even after they sold the land; and the land contract would normally not indicate whether the transaction was an outright or conditional sale. On this occasion, the transaction would occur excluding the grave, and the family would retain the right to use the grave for the purpose of burying the dead and offering sacrifices.[62] However, this rule varied according to localities. For instance, in several regions in Heilongjiang, where the outright sale of a graveyard was prohibited in principle, the seller often was required to specify in the contract the number and locations of graves included in the land subject to transaction; failure to do so would make the transaction "no different from an outright sale" and cause the original landholder to lose his claim to the graves.[63] The family's retention of its right to the grave normally meant that the family was responsible for paying taxes. A report from Dantu county in Jiangsu relates that the

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[60] Xue, *Duli cunyi*, 31: 749.

[61] This is a comprehensive report of customary laws compiled during the last years of the Qing and the first years of the Republic. Matthew Sommer, *Polyandry and Wife-Selling in Qing Dynasty China: Survival Strategies and Judicial Interventions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 16.

[62] *Minshi xiguan diaocha baogaolu* (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2000), 103, 141, 260.

[63] *Minshi xiguan*, 61, 73, 76, 113, 114.

tax duty would not be transferred to the buyer even when the land with a grave was sold outright, and the seller would still be responsible for supplying firewood and paying taxes. Similarly, a report from Yuxiang county in Shanxi states the sale of a graveyard would not entail the removal of a grave or the transfer of tax duties. However, trees that grew in the graveyard would belong to the buyer; thus, the buyer would have a right of logging as long as it did not damage the existing grave.[64]

Conceivably, the presence of a grave could make the land less attractive to the buyer, for the continuing attachment of the original landowner to the grave could be a source of dispute in the future. Some of the accounts from *Report* allude to this. In Bayan county in Heilongjiang, where the outright sale of a graveyard was prohibited, the seller would normally sell the land outright if he had not already arranged a grave or did not have an intention to use the land as a gravesite.[65] In other words, the seller would give up his otherwise permanent right to the land by removing the prospect of using the land as a gravesite. In Zhaodong county in the same province, the buyer would "accept the transaction only if burial had already taken place."[66] Here, the buyer's strategy would be to remove the possibility of arranging a new grave on the land that might entail the enlargement of the original spot reserved for a graveyard and consequently result in encroachment by the original owner. Out of similar concerns, the land transaction was made upon contractually "allowing the moving out [of an existing coffin] but not moving in [of a new coffin]" (*xuqi buxu zaizang* 許起不許再葬, or *xuqian buxu zang* 許遷不許葬), by which the seller was prohibited from illicitly enlarging the gravesite by adding new graves to the existing

[64] *Minshi xiguan*, 209, 156.

[65] *Minshi xiguan*, 91.

[66] *Minshi xiguan*, 103.

ones.[67] Thus, while the principle was to protect the permanent claim of the original landowner to the grave, this rule was contested and applied flexibly, and both buyer and seller could capitalize on the presence of graves to their own benefit.

Protecting an ancestor's grave was a huge moral responsibility prescribed by the imperial ideology, but it often came into conflict with a family's economic interests. For a family that was undergoing a squeeze on household resources, in particular, maintaining a graveyard apparently was a huge burden; for these people, it was possible to consider the graveyard as one of their few disposable assets. For instance, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Qin family in Liaoning province was experiencing the waning of the family fortune to the point that selling a family graveyard was its last resort that could produce revenue. The family graveyard was located in Funing county in northeastern Hebei, where the Qin originated. By 1791, the family shrank, leaving only two surviving family members, Qin Kuan and his nephew, Qin Fugong. They moved to Jianchang county in Liaoning to make a living, where Qin Fugong worked as a tenant farmer. Early on in 1783, Qin Fugong's father sold 5 *mu* 畝 of extra land in the family graveyard in Funing to Huang Mei conditionally, with 36,600 *wen* 文 of conditional sale price. Upon the death of Qin Fugong's father in 1790, Qin Kuan figured that the family had declined to the point that there was no way to redeem the land. He decided to sell the land outright and had Qin Fugong handle the matter. In other words, putting a family graveyard on the market for sale was a feasible option for the Qin in response to the dire financial situation. When Qin Fugong discussed this matter with Huang Mei, however, Huang refused to buy the land, saying "I cannot buy the graveyard." Thus, the presence of graves worked against the Qins' interest. Although it is unclear what was on the negotiation table, Huang likely declined the Qins' offer because, even

[67] *Minshi xiguan*, 79, 86, 111.

if he bought the land outright, he still would have had to acknowledge the Qins' right to the graves. Anyhow, upon Huang's decline of his offer, Qin Fugong came up with a fraudulent tactic to close a deal. Qin Fugong paid another visit to Huang Mei, this time accompanied by a middleman, Yang Yongfang, and told Huang that the Qin would relocate the graves to Jianchang and vacate the land. Qin Fugong reasoned that the Qin family had already moved to Jianchang, and since it was inconvenient to come all the way back to Funing for sacrifices, they decided to move the ancestral graveyard to Jiangchang county. This was a lie, but it worked for Huang. Huang agreed to buy the land with a supplementary payment of 19,200 *wen*. Qin Fugong then went to the gravesite, secretly dug up the bodies, and flattened the graves. He then moved the bodies to the place near his residence in Jianchang. Qin Kuan, who did not know about this behind-the-scenes-story, found out in the spring of 1791 that the family graveyard had been turned into farmland. Qin Kuan subsequently accused Qin Fugong of digging up the ancestral graves without the family's permission.[68] Although we cannot generalize Qin Fugong's decision and action into what conventionally happened when a family went through financial difficulties, this case does indicate that the security of the body buried in a grave was highly dependent on the security of the family's claim to the land. In spite of the customary law that attempted to protect the family's permanent attachment to the grave, it was easily neglected as a graveyard was put on the negotiation table. The bodily sanctity of the dead, and the ideal of a grave as the dead's permanent home, was negotiable.

[68] *Gongzhong dang'an*, 2-1-7-8122-11.

iii. The Temporary Home

If the security of the body buried in a grave was at constant risk, then we can easily imagine how vulnerable the body would have been to the risk of exposure when it was disposed "without a home" – that is, when the body was left unburied. Bodies could be stored temporarily in a variety of ways. In some cases, the body would be put in a coffin and stay inside the house of the family, as seen from a number of zombie tales in the previous chapter. When a coffin was placed outside of the house, the family would find an empty spot in one of various locations, including a field, a farmland, mountainous area, and a temple. Placing a coffin in these locations would normally require the family or the caretaker to build a simple brick structure or a shabby hut that could cover a coffin.

Although this kind of space was not the dead's permanent home, it still created a distinct mechanism through which the dead body became entangled with the property value of these spaces. When the space was free – for instance, when the body was placed on a public property – the family could use the space without spending any money, but it had to risk high possibilities of encroachment by animals or thieves; it was virtually the same as abandoning the dead. If the space was owned and managed by someone, then the family would have had to pay a usage fee and ask for protection in exchange. In other words, the family rented out a temporary space. This kind of temporary space was brought to the imperial attention in 1815, when it was reported that over thirty unburied coffins were robbed and damaged in Hangzhou. During the investigation, the governor of Zhejiang discovered numerous small facilities that were built in the area adjacent to West Lake. Each of these facilities was used to store coffins inside. According to the governor's report, the facilities were composed of buildings that formed a cluster: some consisted of around ten, others several tens, of these buildings. The capacity of each building

varied as well; some of the buildings were so small that only one or two coffins would fit, while others were spacious enough to store three or four coffins. These buildings were managed based on annual fees collected from the families, which varied from 1,000-2,000 wen to over 10,000 wen; whatever the amount was, however, "compared to the expenses for paying the rent, the family would profit more from selling the land at their disposal." In other words, instead of burying the dead family members in an expensive plot of land near the city, the family would rent a storage for a small annual fee and sell the land in order to make a fortune. This, the governor claims, was why "there were more and more storages while fewer and fewer graves." Thus, renting a space in a facility was a strategic management of household resources for the urban residents who could not easily purchase and maintain a graveyard. [69] The facilities were maintained depending on how long the family could provide care for the dead financially. According to the report, the facilities would deteriorate once the family stopped paying the fees, and when left without care for long, the buildings would eventually crumble, leaving the coffins exposed. The exposed body in an abandoned site was a visual demonstration of the family's detachment from the dead, which would invite thieves to prey on the abandoned dead bodies.

[69] De Groot provides the description of similar buildings he observed in Amoy. These buildings, "capable of holding several hundreds of coffins," provided a space for coffins waiting for the family to find a suitable burial site. In De Groot's description, the buildings were "consisted of long rows of rooms, each on an average ten feet by twenty and partially divided in two apartments by an open work screen across the middle. Inside, a coffin would be placed on two inverted water jars [instead of wooden supports in order to prevent the coffins from falling to the ground as ants attacked the wood. De Groot further provides an interesting description of these facilities located a mile outside of the east gate of Canton, where the buildings were laid out "in the form of a small town," with "two of its sides being flanked by a lofty wall" as a measure to protect the coffins from robbers. According to De Groot, these institutions were all private property licensed by the government and were run based on an entrance fee and a monthly rent collected from those who placed the dead in the buildings. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 131-2.

Thus, the mechanism of temporary disposal relied on the chain of supply and demand for these cheap temporary spaces for the dead.[70]

The misery of these uncared dead bodies was best illustrated in two criminal cases that happened in communal cemeteries located in the suburbs of Beijing. In both cases, the bodily sanctity of the dead buried in the cemeteries was violated by the very people who were supposed to provide protection, the grave managers.

In the first case, five culprits – Old Shen, Fifth Ping, Wu De, Third Chui, and Widow Chen – were arrested in 1740 for digging up dead bodies unlawfully. They were all residents of either Daxing or Wanping counties of Shuntian prefecture – the capital prefecture in which Beijing was located. Moreover, they all had certain land at their disposal which they managed as communal cemeteries. The source does not reveal the details about who were buried in the cemeteries, but these were likely impoverished migrants and locals from the city. It appears that running the cemeteries was a significant source of income, for they received an entrance fee every time a new body entered the cemetery. The amounts were ‘’several hundred” cash; only Old Shen gave a somewhat specific range of numbers: 200-300 cash. It appears that these cemetery managers were put on the spot as the cemetery space got full and no more burial was available, which meant that they could not generate revenues anymore. When this happened, the managers dug up old coffins and filled the spots with new ones. The bodies, once dug up, were disposed of in other places – without coffins, probably dumped inside a pit and covered with earth – and the old coffins were burned. The number of bodies dug up from each cemetery varied as well, but it appears that recycling the burial space was quite lucrative. For example, Old Shen dug up 26 coffins during the seventh month of this year and dug up a few more coffins two

[70] *Gongzhong dang’an*, 03-1697-037; *Gongzhongdang zouzhe*, 019552.

months later – conceivably to make additional spots. This means that he received at least 26 new corpses during the two months. Assuming the average payment for a coffin was 250 cash, then he earned 6,500 cash in two months.[71]

The second case, which happened almost a century later, was quite similar. In 1827, a group of people in the Dizang temple located at West City, the western suburb of Beijing outside of Fucheng gate, were prosecuted for illegally digging up dead bodies from the temple cemetery. From the early Qianlong reign, the temple cemetery had been used to dispose of the coffins of Shanxi migrants in Beijing. The culprits were five temple personnel - two monks and three laborers – who allegedly took part in digging up and cremating dead bodies deposited at the cemetery. They testified that the cremation of old bodies had been carried out regularly for several decades, ever since the time of the previous head monk, Xincheng. Every time a new coffin was brought to the temple, the bodies "without any person who burned paper money for them" were dug up, regardless of how long the bodies had been kept in the temple. The spots were filled with new corpses that came to the temple along with several-hundred cash of "incense money." The new head monk, Anxi, who had come to the temple two years before the case was uncovered, continued this practice. During his term, at least six corpses were dug up from the cemetery.[72]

In both cases, removing old bodies produced profits out of a limited space. The dead's temporary space was reserved as far as the family paid usage fees; once the family stopped paying the fee - meaning that the family no longer claimed the space - the space was recycled for the new occupant that came along with the new usage fee. Upon the prosecution of the cases, the Qing government issued prohibitions criticizing the "habitual" exhumation of the dead craving

[71] *Gongzhong dang'an*, 2-1-7-14066-8.

[72] *Junjichu dang'an* (National Palace Museum, Taipei), 057145.

for profits, portraying such acts as a sign of immorality that contaminated the customs of local society. Such ideologized attack against these people, apparently, was hardly effective, as can be seen from the fact that similar incidents happened in the same locality over the course of a century; and we do not know how many other cases of recycling burial sites would have happened in the blind spot of the imperial scrutiny.

Overall, the other face of the so-called illicit burial practices was a struggle to survive in the competitive economy of the mid Qing. People involved in these cases did not conceive of burial solely in terms of the ritual duty of ancestor worship; rather, burying dead bodies was contingent on other practical matters, such as meeting tax requirements, managing the family budget, and dying far away from home. Breaching the dead's space and thus violating the dead's sanctity happened while these people were struggling to continue their livelihood. That being said, they do not represent a homogenous status group nor were they a product of monolithic immorality. Some were losing the graveyard as the family declined, some postponed burial in order to accumulate family fortune, and some disposed of the dead in a communal cemetery or in a coffin storage in the hope of status advancement. These people may be exceptional in the sense that their conduct was unacceptably and unambiguously felonious, but it is highly possible that they represent a tiny segment of a much larger population that was engaging in similar negotiations between moral duty and financial struggle.

VI. Conclusion: The Dead's Home as a Family's Property

Seen through the lens of law and punishment, this chapter has examined how unburied dead bodies were brought to the center of Qing discourse on social ills. Heavily influenced by the neo-Confucian stress on the bodily sanctity of the dead, the Qing government attempted to

reform burial customs by regulating the performance of death rituals that were deemed improper. These attempts to control burial sprang from the premise that the properly arranged home for the dead should be the focus of social order and harmony. It was supposed to exemplify the ideal familial relationship in which the living and the dead were bound together harmoniously following the Confucian ethics. What the government overlooked was the cost of realizing this ideal. Aside from the material expenses necessary for arranging a "proper" burial site, coffin, and supplies, there was also the cost one had to bear in order to fulfill the duty of proper burial in the circumstances where it was simply not very feasible – such as, when the family was running out of resources, when the family migrated into a new place of living, and when the ancestral grave was too far away.

The discrepancy between ideal and reality delineated in this chapter compels us to revisit the thesis of standardization that has shaped the studies of death rituals in late imperial China. Scholars have maintained that certain rituals standardized because of the function – either ideological or practical – the rituals fulfilled. James Watson observed a significant uniformity of funerary rites, which occurred because the uniform death rituals worked as a mark of homogenous Chinese cultural trait; meanwhile, Evelyn Rawki argued that Chinese death rituals homogenized as a result of the constant efforts of imperial states and elites to propagate the right format of death rites. In contrast, Donald Sutton argued that the late imperial death rituals were significantly heterogenous. This scholarship has delved into the questions about what caused homogeneity or heterogeneity of death rites. James Watson and Evelyn Rawski, for instance, observed considerable standardization of funerary rites across regions in China by the late imperial period, which they claimed was driven by the uniform ritual performance and the orthodox belief system, respectively. Donald Sutton, meanwhile, refuted this thesis by showing

that death rites in the Qing were quite heterogeneous because local customs played an important role in expressing the emotions of mourners.[73] While scholars have made different arguments on the standardization of death rituals, they all focused on how the ritual efficacy influenced the spread of certain rituals. In other words, scholars have seen that the proliferation of a certain ritual was closely tied to the function it fulfilled.

Interestingly, rites of disposal have been largely left out from the discussion – possibly because the unlawful disposal of dead bodies hardly fit the functional-structural scheme of death rituals. James Watson explicitly made this point by claiming that the variation of post-disposal rites is an example of "variation within an overarching structure of unity."[74] This chapter shows that several occasions of illicit burial were compelled by practical circumstances that outweighed the desire for ritual efficacy. There may have been a room for seeking ritual efficacy by delaying burial (for instance, finding land with good fengshui), it is also important to think about the practical issues people had to face when burying the dead. This implies that the obstacle to standardization was not merely the weakness of the imperial ideological power but also the limits of bureaucratic capacity. The imperial efforts at standardization – criminalizing improper disposal of dead bodies and condemning the moral deficit of the family – were as ambiguous as they were ambitious, and the judicial approach could not really address the real problems people had with accomplishing the proper burial.

This point further brings this chapter in line with the scholarship on the wide array of customary practices that existed in defiance of formal law, including salt smuggling, illegal migration to the frontier, the formation of collective brotherhoods, illicit customs of land

[73] Watson, "The Structure of Chinese," 3-19; Rawski, "A Historian's Approach," 20-34; Donald Sutton, "Death Rites and Chinese Cultures: Standardization and Variations in Ming and Qing Times," *Modern China* 33 (2007): 125-153.

[74] Watson, "The Structure of Chinese," 16.

transaction, and unlawful wife-selling practices.[75] Matthew Sommer argues that these instances expose the "dysfunctional aspects of the Qing judicial system" that reflected "the state's failure to project power, to solve intractable problems, and to reform social practice."[76] It may seem that illicit burial customs fall into one of these informal practices to which the Qing government failed to provide adequate solutions. I would claim, however, that the limits of law in reforming burial customs cannot be simply boiled down to failure. Rather, the law was responding to the anxiety of social degeneration in a specific way, by constantly stressing the "orthodox" meaning of the dead's home. While the law may not have come up with practical measures to mobilize popular support for the reform of burial customs, it did garner responses from another segment of society: the public actors who expanded charitable activities for the dead, which is the topic of the following chapter.

[75] Sommer, *Polyandry*, 381.

[76] Sommer, *Polyandry*, 380.

CHAPTER 3. Providing a Home for the Dead

The Rise of Public Death Management in Qing Jiangnan

I. Introduction: Reforming Vulgar Customs Through Charity

The previous chapter examined how exposed dead bodies became a theme of regulation, punishment, and governance under the Qing imperial bureaucracy. The problem of unburial exposed the fundamental weakness of Qing imperial ideology. It was an ominous sign that a growing number of families failed to fulfill their basic duties toward the deceased. It demonstrated to the ruling echelon the moral breakdown of individual families, as well as the inability of the imperial government to properly reform and guide the moral minds of those individuals. The imperial court strove to reform customs by means of law and punishment as a way to demonstrate its regulatory power, but with only limited success.

Promoting proper burial, however, was not only a government initiative. As already discussed in chapter 2, attempts to reform popular death customs in the seventeenth century sprang from locally oriented elites who embraced the neo-Confucian ethics of ritual propriety. These people were the local agents who could translate the imperial zeal to eradicate delayed burial and cremation into an actual outcome in the local context. From the mid eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century, these local individuals in several localities in Jiangnan mobilized initiatives and resources to organize charitable groups (called *shantang* 善堂, normally translated as "benevolent halls" or "benevolent associations") that specialized in managing burial of exposed dead bodies. These local figures – or, the government's partnership

with these people – produced a viable approach to the problem of unburied dead bodies. This chapter delves into the emergence and proliferation of charitable activities of managing death and burial in Jiangnan during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Particularly stressing how charities came up with strategies to change the material conditions of burial, this chapter shows that the expansion of charities materialized the ideology of proper burial in the local context of Jiangnan.

The first section of this chapter analyzes a number of prominent charities that emerged in Jiangnan in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries based on the records from local gazetteers. The gist of the approach was to give a free home to the homeless dead, by arranging and expanding public cemeteries – called *yizhong* (literally meaning "charitable graveyard"). Therefore, the formation and function of charities depended on how well and smoothly charities were able to acquire and maintain physical land used for burying a large quantity of dead bodies swiftly and efficiently. In carrying out this task, charities developed a number of sophisticated business strategies, financial investments, and resource management, which often took place in cooperation with the local government. As a product of collaboration between government sponsorship and localized activism, charities in Jiangnan grew into conspicuous public actors amassing a significant amount of resources and landed properties, with which they aggressively intervened in and transformed the local deathscape.

The second section analyzes an account book produced in 1844 by Tongrentang, one of the most successful and well-known charities specializing in death management in nineteenth-century Shanghai. The account book provides a closer look at how resources were collected and allocated, and how collecting and burying dead bodies actually functioned. The account book further reveals, as discussed in the third section, how Tongrentang understood and classified the

beneficiaries of charitable burial. Here, I stress a paradoxical feature of the charity for the dead. While public burial normally stood for a "benevolent" enterprise (*shanshi* 善事) devoted to providing proper burial places for abandoned and exposed dead bodies, in reality it was closer to a semi-administrative undertaking that involved inspecting, classifying, and collecting unburied dead bodies. In particular, the task of managing death and burial empowered charities to sort out the unclaimed dead from among unburied dead bodies, based on whether families were capable of providing burial when they were asked to do so. Therefore, the unclaimed dead buried in public cemeteries referred to bodies whose families failed to claim them, rather than bodies without any family. In a sense, being buried in a public cemetery meant that the dead body was "classified" as homeless. Thus, while the cemetery was supposed to be an alternative home for the homeless dead, it also confirmed and fixed the displacement of unburied bodies.

II. Expanding Public Cemeteries During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Aiding the impoverished who died without any means of decent burial had been a chief component of benevolent governance of the Chinese imperial state. As a hybrid of charity and local administration, the system of arranging free burial sites open to the public had existed throughout the late imperial period. In the Song, public cemeteries called *louzeyuan* 漏澤園 were established in each locality as the imperial government made an order in 1079 that all local governments should establish charitable graveyards. The management of these sites was entrusted to Buddhist novices who obtained ordination certificates and served as grave

managers.[1] In the Ming and the Qing, public cemeteries were a common feature, indeed an indispensable part, of local society; most were located on vacant land or on hillsides on the fringes of communities.[2] Cemeteries were particularly essential in the environment of frontier settlement, for it was extremely difficult for impoverished new settlers to find suitable land for burial. In eighteenth-century Taiwan, for instance, communal cemeteries were arranged on undeveloped lands, taking the bodies of poor settlers free of charge.[3]

During the eighteenth century in Jiangnan, this kind of free public burial sites significantly expanded. While it is difficult to quantify the increase of free burial sites, gazetteer records of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from Zhejiang and Jiangsu affirm the general growth of local activism related to building and managing public cemeteries.

The concept of "public" is part of a lively debate on the role of the local in the shift of state-society relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Scholars have recognized during this period the rise of a distinct form of local elite activism – what has conventionally been called the "public sphere." The rise of localized activism hinged on the emergence of extrabureaucratic groups that specialized in local managerial tasks and therefore, increasingly "fulfilled the regulatory functions beyond normal reach of the bureaucracy."[4] Mary Rankin, in particular, explains that the mechanism of elite management conspicuously emerged during the periods of late Qianlong, Jiaqing, and Daoguang emperors – roughly corresponding to the late

[1] Ebrey, "The Response of the Sung State," 223; Joanna Handlin Smith, *The Art of Doing Good: Charity in Late Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 82, 91-92, 221-222.

[2] In the late Ming and early Qing, in particular, individual philanthropists launched charitable programs to help impoverished neighbors, especially during times of hardship such as war, famine, and drought. See Smith*, The Art of Doing Good*.

[3] Weiting Guo, "Social Practice and Judicial Politics in 'Grave Destruction Cases' in Qing Taiwan, 1683-1895," in *Chinese Law: Knowledge, Practice and Transformation, 1530s to 1950s*, ed. Li Chen (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 90.

[4] Joseph Fewsmith, "From Guild to Interest Group: The Transformation of Public and Private in Late Qing China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25 (1983): 618.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – because "the regular bureaucracy failed to keep pace with the population."[5] During this period, the elite managers of local public works, normally low-level degree holders in the locality, increasingly expanded their presence in the management of local community affairs – such as granaries, water conservancy, and famine relief – particularly through dominating resource mobilization and management.[6] Charitable institutions were the organizational basis of these activities. In particular, scholars have stressed that, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, this local activism reached its highest point in conjunction with the decline of the Qing imperial government after a series of internal and external crises.[7] Local public works in this period grew into semi-administrative projects that took care of daily matters on behalf of a rapidly deteriorating imperial bureaucracy. Therefore, the growth of local public activism in Jiangnan throughout the nineteenth century occurred as a part of the general

[5] Mary Rankin, "The Origin of a Chinese Public Sphere: Local Elites and Community Affairs in the Late Imperial Period," *Études chinoises* 9 (1990): 24.

[6] Seung-hyun Han examined the growth of local initiatives in the local hydraulic project in early nineteenth-century Suzhou from the gradual expansion elite participation in financing the projects. According to Han, there were four methods of resource mobilization: (1) direct mobilization of state funds, (2) state loan reimbursed in multiple-year installments by the community through levying surcharges on the land, (3) local donations, and (4) "landlord supply food, tenants supply labor." He observes that there was a clear shift of trend over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from state funds to local donations, which further called for the participation of local elites as chief managers of the project. Han, *After the Prosperous Age,* 23-74. He Wenkai also discussed the operation of advanced state funds that were later returned by means of surcharges on taxes. See He Wenkai, "Public Interest as a Basis for Early Modern State-Society Interactions: Water Control Projects in Qing China, 1750-1850," *Environment and History* 23 (2017): 455-476.

[7] Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*; Rankin, *Elite Activism*; William Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); William Rowe, "The Problem of 'Civil Society' in Late Imperial China," *Modern China* 19 (1993): 139-157; Mary Rankin, "Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere," *Modern China* 19 (1993): 158-182; Frederic Wakeman, "Boundaries of the Public Sphere in Ming and Qing China," *Daedulas* 127 (1998): 167-189. These works stand for the early generation of scholarship that pioneered in the studies of state-society relationship of the Qing. These scholars particularly emphasize that the growth of public initiatives was partially prompted by the catastrophic destruction during the Taiping rebellion and other mid-century crises, and therefore, the rise of local leadership mainly occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Recently, a number of scholars have argued that the state retreat from local governance began earlier, in the early nineteenth century with the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition. See Han, *After the Prosperous Age*; Wang, *White Lotus Rebels*; McMahon, *Rethinking the Decline.*

trend of the state retreat from local affairs and the virtual autonomy of locally rooted managerial groups that took control of public works. In this way, previous scholarship has demonstrated a clear shift in the state-society balance, from strong state control in the eighteenth century to locally-centered initiative in the nineteenth century.[8]

The history of the expansion of public cemeteries in Jiangnan from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries provides the opportunity to extend the debate about state-society relations into the realm of burial.[9] With the expansion of public cemeteries, burial became a public matter that deserved public funds, resources, and management.[10] The resources were often mobilized in the form of government subsidy, but in many cases, the locals raised funds collectively in order to purchase and manage properties used for charitable burial. In particular,

[8] The historical significance of this development was the fact that some of these local public actors gained power and influence to the point that they politicized and stood against the state at the turn of the twentieth century, as they determined that the Qing government was not capable of protecting the local interest. In other words, the rise of a public – or social, as opposed to the state – sector occurred in a way that it alienated from the state and thus threatened the authority of the imperial government in the local administrative arena. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*; Ebrey, *Elite Activism*.

[9] These cemeteries were called *yizhong*, charitable cemeteries. However, I prefer to call these cemeteries "public" cemeteries in order to stress the public nature of this institution. According to Mary Rankin, *yi* often implied public "in the sense of being available to all and charitably endowed, if not always completely free." Rankin, "The Origin of a Chinese Public Sphere," 51.

[10] It is important to note that, in the context of early modern China, the range of "public" was highly elastic and ambiguous. Mary Rankin emphasizes that the relations between state authority and public management were ambiguous, just as was the dividing line between public and private. Often, public activities were organized and sponsored by what we could consider to be private organizations, such as certain religious groups, occupational guilds, native-place associations, and even lineages (private, exclusionary kinship organization). Activities of these groups often constituted public activities "when they provided commonly available infrastructure or contributed to broader community projects." There are in fact a number of examples of "public" cemeteries established and managed by private families. For instance, the Jiaqing-era gazetteer of Songjiang prefecture introduces a cemetery (*guangxiaoqian* 廣孝阡) in Fengxian county that was established by a *shengyuan* 生員 named Wang Rulun in order to bury the impoverished relatives. Similarly, the gazetteer has an entry of the "three-surname grave" (*sanxingmu* 三性墓) located in Nanhui county. The grave was built by the resident of Nanhui, Shen Minghe, to bury his maternal grandfather (surnamed Ma), father-in-law (surnamed Tang), and elder brother-in-law (surnamed Xu), all of whom did not have descendant. Another communal grave in the county was the "grave of the Hu," a burial site for the Hu family members without descendant. It appears that, in spite of the fact that these cemeteries were attached to certain family, these were not considered as a private property. *Songjiangfu zhi* (1818), 16: 17-20. Rankin, "Some Observations," 166.

the major resources were arranged either in the form of landed properties – obtained either from government endowment or through individual donations – or through capital endowment, the management of which was entrusted to charities. Therefore, a significant amount of land was amassed under the name of charitable groups, serving as a stable source of revenue production. Therefore, charities' commitment to public burial made them major landowners as well as distinguished economic actors in the locality.

i. Resource Mobilization

The first step of charitable burial was to arrange a communal burial site, which happened in a variety of ways: locals could raise funds collectively to purchase a plot of land where they built a cemetery; a local government could donate government land or unregistered land to transform it into a cemetery; or an existing cemetery could be renovated and enlarged. Since a cemetery was normally built on vacant land at the edge of a community, arranging the cemetery site itself did not cause that much of a financial burden. Moreover, in many cases, once it confirmed the charitable purpose of the land, the government would exempt it from taxation.[11] Most of the financial burden instead came from the work of locating and transporting unburied dead bodies from the site of disposal to the cemetery. Charities also provided coffins – either

[11] This process normally entailed the registration of the land as a "public land" or "government land" in the land register, which granted the charitable usage of the land in perpetuity. That being said, there appear to have been charitable cemeteries that were not tax exempt. For instance, the Qianlong-era gazetteer of Nanhui county records that some of the charitable cemeteries in the county had not been granted tax exemption, and therefore, the original owners of the land (those who donated the land) were responsible for taxes. I assume in these cases that the amount for taxation would have been collected communally, possibly in the form of subscription. Duara observed a similar form of corporate fund raising for religious ceremonies dedicated to village tutelary gods – what he calls "ascriptive village association." For instance, the Tudi temple in the village of Wu's Shop was owned collectively by villagers and the temple ceremonies were financed by the levy on each household. *Nanhuixian xinzhi* (1793), 15: 9; Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 127.

purchased or manufactured – for bodies found without any coffin. Normally, handling of these matters and other daily administration of public burial fell into hands of the managers of the local charity – even when the funds were granted from the state.

Cases from Suzhou prefecture demonstrate the model of strong state initiative in promoting public management of burial. Originally, a group of local philanthropists set up an organization called Xileitang in 1735 to carry out charitable burial. It began by clearing up the existing communal cemeteries located in suburban areas that had long been abandoned and encroached upon by villagers. In 1738, a large-scale land donation took place under the auspices of Liu Bai, surveillance commissioner of Anhui, who granted 579 *mu* of land in Wujiang county and 8 *mu* of land in Zhenjiang county, along with 2,850 taels of state subsidy. As a result, Xileitang became a gigantic burial provider that managed 12 new cemeteries in addition to the existing 16 cemeteries. Around the same time, there was another organization called Guangrentang, which started off in 1732 as a local burial society specializing in supporting burial (*daizang* 代葬) of the impoverished people. In 1738, Shao Ji, the governor of Jiangsu, granted 169 *mu* of landed properties in Zhangzhou county and 75 *mu* of land in Yuanhe county to expand Guangrentang's charitable activities. Furthermore, local elites joined this initiative by making donations of 140 *mu* of land. In 1743, Chen Dashou, who replaced Shao Ji as governor of Jiangsu, granted 60 percent of annual tax revenue under the item of "newly registered marshes, reed beds, and alluvial fields" to Guangrenhui.[12] Thus, the lavish government sponsorship was likely a crucial turning point in the growth of these two charitable organizations specializing in burial. These organizations began as local private apparatuses but evolved into public, or even semi-state, ones backed by huge land endowments and capital investments. The investment of

[12] *Zhangzhou xianzhi* (1753), 4: 15-16, 32: 31-33.

state funds in particular aimed at securing sustainable budgets for non-profitable tasks assigned to these organizations.

A similar case comes from Wenzhou prefecture in Zhejiang province. In the area, there were already charitable cemeteries attached to local communal sacrificial altars (*litan* 厲壇) in the suburb of the prefectural seat. In 1678, through a series of land endowments by local officials and elites, over 50 *mu* of charitable cemeteries were newly established. The burial enterprise, however, seems to have been short-lived because "there were neither regulations nor sufficient funds" that could continue public burial. In 1760, local officials collaborated to make another major donation of 323 taels of capital and 150 *mu* of "muddy land" (*tutian*) for the purpose of raising funds: the capital was invested for loans at interest and the land was used to collect rental income. Upon the investment, the burial project transformed into a more systematic enterprise. An office was provided to coffin manufacturers in order to provide free coffins. In addition, regular personnel consist one director (*dongshi* 董事) and eight laborers were assigned to the task of regular inspection and collection of unburied coffins and exposed corpses. The salaries for these people came from the funds allocated for the project: the laborers received 0.02 taels of silver daily; the director received 2 taels of silver each season; and coffin manufacturers earned 0.62 taels per coffin. Furthermore, the procedure for the management of cemeteries was now specified in regulations (*zhangcheng* 章程).[13] Here, again, the fiscal investment by government officials was instrumental in making charitable burial more systematic and sustainable, transforming the existing local initiatives into a major enterprise equipped with stable finances, personnel, and regulations.

[13] *Wenzhou fuzhi* (1760), 6: 24-26.

Unlike the above two cases, the government was not necessarily a major "investor" in Xiaoshan county in Zhejiang province. Here, a mid-century natural disaster prompted civilian endowments of cemeteries and a charitable burial enterprise. In 1776, a huge flood hit the county. As a river rose above its dike and poured into flat lowland, a countless number of coffins – probably ones that had been kept unburied and left exposed on empty land near the riverbank – floated down and accumulated in the villages surrounding the county seat. The magistrate launched a county-wide project to clear up these coffins, followed by a series of land endowments by local elites: a *jiansheng* 監生 from Shanyin county purchased a mountain to bury the bodies; another *jiansheng* from Xiaoshan county donated 30 *mu* of land that had belonged to his family and purchased another 20 *mu* of mountain land nearby. Furthermore, the provincial administrative commissioner donated 40 *jin* 金 of capital to finance the burial. The outcome was a total of 59 *mu* of cemeteries established in five different locations, where 4,963 bodies were buried. Additionally, another 19-*mu* plot of land was donated to arrange charitable estates, the management of which was entitled to the monks from Chengshan temple. The hired monks were responsible for paying taxes and offering sacrifices out of the revenue produced from the estates.[14] Thus, in this case, the major contribution came primarily from the locals while provincial officials supplied funds as a means to demonstrate support.

Tongrentang in Zhuli – a small town adjacent to Shanghai – grew into a charitable burial provider based on steady local investments (and without any major state subsidy). In 1724, a group of villagers occupied a plot of land to carry out charitable burial. Four years later, the prefect of Songjiang issued a tax exemption and further erected stone steles to mark the territory, officially recognizing the land as a public cemetery. In the early years of the Qianlong reign, the

[14] *Shaoxing fuzhi* (1792), 74: 9.

philanthropists set up an apparatus called Tongrenju and collected subscription – 5 copper cash for each *yuan* 元 (*yuan* being a unit of donation) – in order to raise funds for providing free coffins.[15] However, this enterprise does not seem to have lasted for long because of financial shortage. In 1787, there was another attempt by village philanthropists to raise funds. This time, they raised a total of 470 *yuan* – 2,350 copper cash – to finance the provision of free coffins. Lastly, in 1798, fifteen philanthropists launched a five-year plan for fundraising with a goal to collect 2,000 copper cash per *gu* 股 (*gu* referring to another unit of donation), with each person donating 60 *gu* twice a year.[16] In order to carry out this plan successfully, in 1799, the philanthropists set up an office and named it Tongrentang. They further purchased an 85-*mu* charitable estate that would finance the mass burial twice a year.[17]

Thus, in this case, the charitable burial enterprise began with a local small-scale subscription without any major land or capital endowments coordinated by the state. Although the gazetteer record does not discuss details about previous burial projects, these were likely short-run, temporary projects that aimed at clearing up unburied bodies. Meanwhile, the formal launching of a charitable apparatus in 1799 relying on huge-scale fundraising transformed the nature of the charitable activities into a long-term business, which was possible by securing a budget for five years, as well as a landed properties as a stable source of revenue. Thus, Tongrentang provides an example of the long-term gradual growth of a locally based public burial enterprise.

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[15] The name of the organization suggests that the organization was likely under government auspices, following William Rowe's explanation that the term *ju* 局 often referred to government agencies. That said, the record in the gazetteer does not indicate any financial support on the part of the government. William Rowe, *Hankow,* 103.

[16] If they had fulfilled this goal, then the total amount would have mounted to 18,000,000 cash.

[17] *Zhuli xiaozhi* (1815), 10: 11-4.

ii. Landed Properties

As indicated above, several charities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries struggled to secure stable and sustainable sources of income. Financial conditions directly influenced the stability of the charitable initiative; the charities without enough resources hardly avoided the risk of rapid decline. By the early nineteenth century, it was common for these charities to make investment in corporate funds in preparation for unexpected financial burdens, such as loan interest, real estate investment, or rental income. In particular, several charities in the early nineteenth century were the owners of expansive landed properties that were arranged for the purpose of producing revenue. [18]

These kinds of corporate properties were conceivably modeled on the Fan charitable estate in the Song period. Fan Zhongyan, a famed official of the mid eleventh century, donated over 3,000 *mu* of properties to create a public estate that was held in the name of the clan, the income from which "would provide a permanent reserve for charitable purposes" for needy members of the lineage. The land was owned collectively, meaning that no single member could sell it, and the management of the land was entrusted to members of the corporate body who

[18] This kind of collective property holding was not uncommon in the late imperial period. Prasenjit Duara discussed the temple properties held collectively by villagers in North China in the early twentieth century. Keith Schoppa examined the nine-century long history of collective management of Xiang Lake in Zhejiang. Rubie Watson analyzed the political implication of managing corporate property in twentieth-centry New Territories. Jerry Dennerline delved into the relationship between charitable estate and local elites in the rural community in Wuxi, Jiangsu. Lastly, in his monograph on local public works in Suzhou, Seunghyun Han briefly discusses the proliferation of charitable estates in the early nineteenth century. Duara, *Culture, Power and the State*, 118-157; Keith Schoppa, *Xiang Lake: Nine Centuries of Chinese Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Rubie Watson, "Corporate Property and Local Leadership in the Pearl River Delta, 1898-1941," in *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance,* eds. Joseph Esherick and Mary Rankin, 239-260 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Jerry Dennerline, "Marriage, Adoption, and Charity in the Development of Lineages in Wu-hsi from Sung to Ch'ing," in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China,* eds. Patria Ebrey and James Watson, 170-209 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Han, *After the Prosperous Age*, 98-102.

were chosen for the task. The gist of this system was to "provide support and insurance for clan members against unexpected financial burdens," while managers had to ensure the reproduction and sustenance of wealth by "reinvest(ing) surplus income in additional lands or to employ the income for loans at interest."[19]

Aside from the lineage-based estate, another possible model for the Qing-era charitable estate was a system called the grave household (*muhu* 墓戶); the task of households so designated was to maintain someone's grave by producing and managing income from the land attached to the grave of some eminent figures, such as imperial clans, local worthies, or historical figures. Once registered as a grave household, the managers of the land enjoyed certain economic privileges granted by the state. In Yichuan county in Shaanxi province, for instance, the grave of a Tang-dynasty general, Hun Jian, was composed of a 15-*mu* tomb site and 65-*mu* of additional estate. The latter was "stony and barren" and thus had been left out of the tax cadaster. Neighboring villagers cultivated the land and paid annual rent – 1 *dou* 斗 per *mu* – to the monks who were hired to manage the grave. In 1746, the villagers who had been cultivating the land obtained the status of the grave household and were granted the subsidy of 0.05 taels of silver per *mu* – 3.25 taels total for the 65-*mu* land. In return, they resided in the area and maintained walls and fences while paying the annual rent of 5 *sheng* of grain per *mu*. As before, the rent income was used to feed temple monks. Later, in 1750, the state subsidy to the grave household even expanded as they obtained additional 45 *mu* of estate and 20 *mu* of land for producing rations for laborers (*gongshidi* 工食地). The rent burden accordingly increased to 5 *fen* 分 per *mu,* 2.25

[19] Denis Twitchett, "The Fan Clan's Charitable Estate, 1050-1760," in *Confucianism in Action*, eds. David Nivison at el. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 98-133.

taels total.[20] In Luoyuan county in Fujian province, the grave of a former magistrate, Zhao Pin (a Chinese martial bannerman who served in the county around 1740) had been taken care of by the locals. In 1783, a low-level elite in the county – *gongsheng*, name unspecified – donated land for the purpose of producing rent income that would be used for offering sacrifices to Zhao Pin. The land was subsequently registered to the grave household. The household then rented it out to tenant farmers and collected 450 *jin* of annual rent. The tax burden for this estate was 0.194 silver taels.[21] Conceivably, the state subsidy and the fixed rent rates prevented grave managers from being impoverished and thereby abandoning their duties to maintain the graves.

In early nineteenth-century Jiangnan, several prominent charitable institutions amassed landed properties as charitable estates similar to those discussed above. The public burial projects launched in Jiaxiang county, Zhejiang province, in the early years of the Jiaqing reign provide a glimpse into how properties were collected in order to support public burial projects. In 1799, Wan Xiangbao, the county magistrate, announced the county-wide expansion of charitable land (*yiyuan* 義園) in order to finance charitable burial. Calling for the donation of landed properties, he drew up regulations (*tiaogui* 條規) specifying the procedure of registering charitable estates. Endowers were first asked to hand in the land contracts of the land they were willing to donate. Once the land was examined by yamen staff, the endower's name as well as the size and location of the land were recorded in the cadaster and marked as "charitable use" (*shanxing* 善行). Once registered, the land would be distributed to the charitable land household (*yidihu* 義地戶) and would be used to produce revenues; the management of the land income would be entrusted to corporate bodies, such as monasteries, temples, and charities. Meanwhile,

[20] *Yichuan xianzhi* (1753), 4: 9.

[21] *Xinxiu Luoyuan xianzhi* (1831), 24: 11.

the government would pay for the annual tax requirements levied on the land on behalf of the endower.[22] Therefore, in this case, the magistrate proposed generous tax exemption policy conceivably in order to garner support and advertise the charitable initiative. exempt from the tax duty, the income from these estates would be solely reserved for the management of public burial.

In the case of Yushantang in Lou county in Songjiang prefecture, Jiangsu province, the local government stood at the forefront of mobilizing charitable estates. The charitable burial program in this area began with a group of philanthropists who cleared up long-abandoned cemetery sites in the locality in the early Jiaqing reign. In 1801, the prefect of Songjiang further invested 3,500 taels – 3,200,000 copper cash – of state subsidy to purchase 224 *mu* of landed properties (*tianchan* 田產). The properties then were transferred to Yushantang as a long-term source of income. The land was declared as the "properties of Yushantang" and registered in cadaster under *Yushantang guantianhu* ("the government land household under Yushantang" 與善堂官田戶). Yushantang collected rental income from the *guantianhu* with which it paid taxes.[23]

Tongshanju, a local charity in Sheng county, Zhejiang province, obtained landed properties by incorporating existing charitable estates. In the county, there existed about a 3-*mu* large cemetery in the western suburb donated by a monk in 1753. A year later, magistrate Dai Chun allocated a 19-*mu* plot of land that originally belonged to Puti temple and registered the land under the charitable grave household (*yizhonghu* 義塚戶). The rental income produced from the estate was used for financing burial and sacrifices at the cemetery. In the Daoguang era, village philanthropists set up a corporate organization called Tongshanju and arranged new

[22] *Chongxiu Jiashan xianzhi* (1879), 4: 37-38.

[23] *Louxian xuzhi* (1879), 2: 13.

cemeteries at the eastern suburb. While seeking to expand their financial endowment, they found out about the charitable estate registered under *yizhonghu*. Possibly upon the request made by the philanthropists of Tongshanju, magistrate Li Shipu authorized Tongshanju to manage the charitable estate. Henceforth, Tongshanju collected rent from charitable grave households at the rate for leasing out government properties (*guanzu* 官租). Out of the rental income, Tongshanju paid taxes and further collected 11,000 copper cash of annual revenue. Thus, in this case, the managerial body of the charitable estate moved from Puti temple to Tongshanju.[24]

These cases suggest that securing landed properties was a crucial step in launching and expanding charitable burial projects at the local level. Moreover, the government support in the form of land endowment or tax exemption was presumably indispensable for the growth of local charitable initiatives into landowning formal institutions. This observation is in line with the rise of public charities in late nineteenth-century Hankou examined by William Rowe. In Hankou, charities (or benevolent halls) rose into major landowners that held properties in the rural area as well as urban commercial properties. Rowe, however, found that the financial value of rural landholding was rather meager. He assesses that the income from the rural properties of Zixintang, a local charity active in the nineteenth century, was mediocre compared to the huge rent returns from urban properties. For Rowe, the rural landholding in the post-Taiping urban context of Hankou was likely a means to secure "a minimal level of guaranteed receipts in grain, as a hedge against inflation of food prices."[25] Compared to Hankou, the cases discussed above do seem to stress the importance of rural landholding. The discrepancy may come from the fact that the charities in Hankow grew within the context of rapid urbanization and post-war recovery,

[24] *Shengxian zhi* (1944), 8: 46-7.

[25] Rowe, *Hankow*, 125-6.

and therefore their financial strategies would have been radically different from the charities that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

III. Tongrentang in 1844: A Case Study of Public Death Management in Shanghai

Gazetteer records like the ones I used above are useful in gaining an understanding of what the authors of the gazetteers found important: descriptions of some well-known charitable activities focusing on a number of monumental events. They also provide some information on things like internal regulations, here, too, providing information on an ideal of how the charities were supposed to function. But these sources have their limits in terms of understanding how public burial programs actually functioned. A more valuable source would be an account book or ledger called *zhengxinlu* 徵信錄. Containing detailed information pertaining to the annual income, expenditure, list of donors, and types of charitable activities, these materials reveal how a charity actually implemented the activities it planned and how it allocated resources. Tongrentang in Shanghai is one of the charities that produced and published annual account books. I was able to obtain the account book for the twenty-fourth year of the Daoguang reign, which roughly corresponds to the year 1844.[26] In this section, I will utilize the 1844 account book to examine how the actual outcome of public burial looked like.[27]

Let me begin with a brief history of Shanghai Tongrentang. Tongrentang was by far the most successful charity in the Shanghai area, and one of the most well-known charitable

[26] The twenty-fourth year of Daoguang spans from February 18, 1844 to February 6, 1845. As a matter of convenience, in this chapter, I will use 1844 instead of the twenty-fourth year of the Daoguang reign. Early on, Linda Johnson briefly analyzed Tongrentang's account books for 1831 and 1843. See Linda Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 107-8.

[27] "Tongrentang Zhengxinlu," in *Zhongguo huiguanzhi shiliao jicheng,* eds. Wang Rigen et al., (Fuzhou: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2013), vol.9, 2-139.

institutions in nineteenth-century China. Tongrentang was created in 1804 under the name of Tongren Yushetang, the corporate body of local elites who were dedicated to managing a public cemetery donated by the Shanghai magistrate, Tang Shou. The cemetery was 36-*mu* large, located in twenty-fifth *bao* 保, fourth *tu* 圖,[28] the northwestern suburb outside of the walled city. By 1821, as the old cemetery ran out of space, Tongrentang enlarged the cemetery site by incorporating a 41-*mu* plot of land in the southern suburb (twenty-fifth *bao,* twelfth *tu*) that was donated by another Shanghai magistrate. In 1830, another 41-*mu* plot of land was added to the southern cemetery, endowed by two local officials. As a result, by the 1840s, Tongrentang managed several cemeteries as large as 118 *mu*.[29]

In 1844, Shanghai just opened the port to British merchants following the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. The Opium War itself did not hit Shanghai; the British briefly occupied Shanghai for five days during their advance up the Yangzi River to Nanjing, causing few casualties.[30] Rather, the opening of the port in Shanghai invited whole new groups of merchants, foreigners, and gang organizations that profoundly reshaped the social and demographic landscapes of the city over the following decades – which will be the topic of the next chapter. Here, I just want to point out that 1844 was the year when Shanghai was about to adapt itself to a new environment.

It may not be a coincidence that Tongrentang was expanding rapidly around the year 1844. A year before, two board members of Tongrentang, Zhu Zengling and Zhu Zenghui, launched a spin-off organization that specialized in providing coffins (*sheguan* 賒棺). This new organization was absorbed by Tongrentang in 1855, further expanding the charity under the new

[28] *Bao* and *tu* are terms that indicate sub-county administrative units.

[29] *Shanghai xianzhi* (1814), 7: 42-43.

[30] Johnson, *Shanghai*, 178-182.

title, Tongren fuyuantang.[31] Thereafter, Tongren Fuyuantang became a gigantic charity that virtually monopolized death-related services in urban Shanghai throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.[32]

Around 1844, Tongrentang was an active and prominent actor in the field of charitable burial in the Shanghai area. The rise of Tongrentang coincided with the decline of Tongshantang, a leading charitable organization in Shanghai in the eighteenth century. Although Tongshantang had 87 *mu* of charitable estates under its management, it appears that Tongshantang declined as it suffered from financial crises. The Jiaqing-era county gazetteer records that Tongshantang shut down because it "relied on donations every year [and thus], it quickly ran out of budget."[33] Some later reports indicate that Tongren Fuyuantang absorbed the cemeteries and estates that had formerly belonged to Tongshantang.[34] Meanwhile, outside of the city, several charitable institutions flourished around the time Tongrentang was active. The 1872 gazetteer of Shanghai records six charities that were active during the mid-century, one of which – Maorentang – was set up upon the land endowment by Tongrentang in 1845.[35]

The 1844 account book consists of four parts: regulations, the list of donors that year (including the amounts of donation), other sources of income, and items of expenditure. The

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[31] *Shanghai xianzhi* (1872), 2: 23.

[32] Tongren fuyuantang's landed properties expanded tremendously during the post-Taiping recovery of the city. The total of 9,271-*mu* land was vested to Tongren fuyuantang in 1863; in the Guangxu era, it acquired extra properties including 165 *mu* of cemeteries. The acquisition of this much of properties was of course not for the sole purpose of carrying out charitable burial. Rather, the expansion of landholding in this period was entailed by Tongren fuyuantang's rise into a civic organization that provided a comprehensive range of urban services, such as sanitation, construction, repair, and defense, what the Republican-era gazetteer termed "the beginning of local self-government." *Shanghai xianzhi* (1872), 2: 24; *Shanghaixian xuzhi* (1918), 3: 31. For Tongren fuyuantang's activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 151-158.

[33] *Shanghai xianzhi* (1750), 7: 24-25; *Shanghai xianzhi* (1814), 7: 41.

[34] March 27, 1878, *Shenbao*.

[35] *Shanghai xianzhi* (1872), 2: 27-28.

following analysis of the account book reveals that charitable burial was one of the major services Tongrentang provided to the residents of Shanghai, both living and dead, in order to enhance the welfare of the community and improve the living environment of the city. This observation affirms William Rowe's claim that nineteenth-century charities were the product of an indigenous process of urban social development, rather than the result of Western intervention.[36] It denotes that charities were distinctly localist and extragovernmental organizations that existed as a kind of institutionalized social self-help in the fields where the local government was not present on a regular basis. Tongrentang's account book affirms this point. As seen below, regular collection and burial of exposed bodies was part of the regular administration of the city through a self-regulated mechanism of collecting funds, orchestrating resources and labor forces, and managing budgets.

The total income of the year was 5,677,495 *wen*.[37] The account book divides it into seventeen different categories. A big chunk of the annual income came from subscriptions. Two basic types of subscriptions were the annual subscription (*zongjuan* 總捐) and the seasonal subscription (*suijuan* 歲捐).[38] There was also an additional item of contribution called *shiwenyuan* 十文愿 collected from the members. The other eight items include subscriptions from particular kinds of merchant shops, such as bean businesses, cloth shops, and pawnshops.[39]

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[36] Rowe, *Hankow*, 13-14.

[37] The size of the budget of the year was fairly consistent with two other years cited by Johnson: 5,440,000 copper cash in 1831, and 5,900,000 copper cash in 1842. The year 1844 was particularly disastrous year that desperately required charitable aids. Except for an earthquake that happened in the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, there is no record of serious natural disasters that required relief activities. Johnson, *Shanghai,* 107-8; *Shanghai xianzhi* (1872), 30: 18.

[38] The difference between the two appears to be that the former indicates the regular subscription that repeats every year, while the latter refers to the subscription that was specific to that year.

[39] These items were collected via a tax-like system, obliging them to carve out certain portions of their revenues. For example, rulers were set that the bean business donated 25 cash per 100 *dan* 擔 of bean

Other smaller items include contributions from the customhouse and the annual interest from loan investment. Finally, there was a small amount of rental income: 13,600 copper cash from renting out an urban property and 31,976 copper cash from renting out rural estates.[40] Therefore, Tongrentang seems to be quite different from other charities discussed above that relied on rental income and revenues from estates. Instead of landed properties and rental income, Tongrentang primarily relied on the contributions from diverse groups of urban merchant communities. Presumably, these urban constituents were the main supporter as well as the beneficiary of Tongrentang's services.

The total amount of expenditure in 1844 was 5,487,504 copper cash. Tongrentang was mostly known for four areas of services: supporting widows (*xuli* 恤嫠), supporting elderly (*shanlao* 贍老), providing free coffins (*shiguan* 施棺), and charitable burial (*yanmai* 掩埋). In 1844, Tongrentang allocated over 70% of its budget for providing these services. There were also several other services, including burial support (*daizang*). The amount spent for the three death-related services – free coffins, charitable burial, and burial support – was 1,561,846 copper cash, about 30% of the total expenditure. Furthermore, Tongrentang was involved in collecting unidentified dead bodies from rivers and roads, for which it spent 28,324 copper cash. The detailed items and amounts of expenditure are indicated in table 1.

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sales. The rate was 25 cash per 200 *dan* of bean cakes. Cloth shops donated 10 cash per bundle (*bao*). Johnson shows that the same system appears in the account book of 1842. William Rowe also talks about the similar practice of contributions in Hankow, where "merchants and property holders of a [benevolent] hall's neighborhood service area were at times simply assessed a fixed amount by the hall," which told Rowe that "the halls seem nearly to have acquired the power of taxation over their middle-class constituents." Rowe, *Hankow*, 122.

[40] The composition of the annual income in 1844 is generally consistent with that of 1842 analyzed by Johnson.

Table 1. The annual expenditure of Tongrentang in 1844

TYPE OF SERVICE		EXPENDITURE	
Supporting widows		1,018,500	
Supporting the elderly		1,747,600	
Free coffins	**Coffin arrangement**	**607,120**	**658,080**
	Material supplies	**50,960**	
Charitable burial	**Burial expenses**	**159,320**	**550,981**
	Public cemetery expenses	**391,661**	
Burial support		**352,785**	
Supplying "grand peace water (*taipingshui*)"		123,551	
Collecting abandoned corpses on the street		28,324	
Miscellaneous fees		872,657	
Supporting a charity in Congxi village		39,920	
Supporting charitable school		95,106	
TOTAL		5,487,504	

The three services for the dead were the most common type of death-related charities that proliferated in the nineteenth century. Each one of these services, however, aimed to fulfill different needs of the community.

To begin with the provision of free coffins, Tongrentang supplied coffins to residents who were "impoverished and sick without any means to afford a coffin." The beneficiary was required to request the service either via a guarantor who was affiliated with Tongrentang or by oneself after providing name, address, and family information. Once the request was accepted, Tongrentang issued a certificate. Judging by the amount spent for this service, it was obviously the most expensive service among the three. In 1844, Tongrentang supplied 30 coffins; the price per coffin was a 3,200-cash manufacturing fee plus 40 cash for delivery (from the coffin shop to the Tongrentang office). There were also 18 coffins donated from shops for which Tongrentang only paid a delivery fee of 40 cash per coffin.

Although 3,200 cash was not a particularly lavish amount for purchasing a coffin, these coffins likely were decent products manufactured by professional coffin craftmen. Furthermore, these coffins would have been sturdy enough to fulfill the basic function: to store the body intact at least for the mortuary term until it was finally buried in a grave. There were in fact even cheaper coffins called pine-board coffins (*songbanguan* 松板棺), which cost 1,000 cash each. Judging by the fact that there was no delivery fee charged for these coffins, pine-board coffins were likely manufactured on demand in Tongrentang by its staff. In 1844, Tongrentang supplied 160 pine-board coffins. Although the account book does not clearly state to whom these coffins were provided, almost all of these coffins – 158 – were buried in Tongrentang's cemeteries. Furthermore, Tongrentang spent 22,260 cash for encoffining and transporting 159 corpses in pine-board coffins – 140 cash each. Thus, the bodies buried in pine-board coffins were likely those found without any family or claimer, that is, unidentified corpses.

Thus, the difference between free coffins and pine-board coffins is clear. No matter how humble the coffin might have been, the coffin provision service was for those with a clear

identity that could be certified by the families, friends, and neighbors. The goal of this service was to provide a decent container for the dead whose passage was likely mourned by his or her social circles. In contrast, a pine-board coffin was likely the humblest form that was adequate to its most basic function: containing the body.

Another service for the dead, burial support, provided free transportation of coffins to the burial site. In 1844, Tongrentang spent a total of 352,785 copper cash to pay for the transportation of 155 coffins. Unlike the free coffin service, the price for this service was not fixed. It appears that the price depended on the number of porters hired, the amount of lime (*hui* 灰) used, and the distance of transportation. Normally, Tongrentang provided 2 *dan* of lime and 4 porters for transporting one coffin; if the destination was somewhere in the suburb near the city, such as twenty-fifth *bao* fourth *tu*, then the average price range was 2,000-2,500 cash. When there were more coffins added, then the amount of lime and the number of porters multiplied. For example, the transportation of two coffins – of the same family buried in the same location – required 4 *dan* of lime and 8 porters, and the cost jumped to 4,500-5,000 cash. In fact, there were only 25 cases of transporting a single coffin. The biggest number of coffins transported at once was 8 coffins from the Chen family. Tongrentang provided 16 *dan* of lime and 24 porters. The coffins were transported via ferries all the way to the east of Jing'an Temple – possibly in twenty-seventh *bao,* eighth *tu*, which was quite distant from the urban center. The overall cost for this single case was 18,410 cash.

Thus, both free coffins and burial support aimed at serving a limited number of beneficiaries, and the goal of these services was to help the family smoothly send off the dead by taking care of some costly and cumbersome jobs. Clearly, the purpose of these services was to

prevent the bodies and coffins from staying unburied for long due to the financial difficulties of the family.

Compared to these services, charitable burial was a cheap, cost-efficient, and mass-oriented service. It had a clear and single goal: to get rid of unburied bodies from above the ground. The cost for burial varied depending on the size of the body: 140 cash for burying a big coffin, 70 cash for a small coffin, and 30 cash for a bone jar. In 1844, Tongrentang spent the total of 159,320 cash for burying over 1,800 bodies. The details of the burial project will be discussed below. Aside from the burial fee, Tongrentang further provided supplies required for burial and maintenance at cemeteries. For instance, Tongrentang spent 36,000 cash to purchase 184 bamboo sticks attached to individual stone tablets, and 2,448 cash for purchasing 3,000 pieces of "yellow road bricks" (*huangdaozhuan* 黃道磚; possibly the materials used for building the inner structure of a grave pit). Other expenses include fixing fences, lacquering the cemetery facilities, and supplying equipment such as shovels and ropes. Sponsoring the annual religious ritual, *yulanpen* 盂蘭盆, was another important item, for which Tongrentang spent 90,467 cash – the biggest single expenditure among those in the category of public cemetery expenses.[41]

Therefore, Tongrentang's public services were much broader than providing burial to unburied dead bodies. In fact, charitable burial took up only a small portion of the annual budget.

[41] *Yulanpen,* also known as the ghost festival, refers to a popular festival of offering sacrifices to the dead on the fifteenth day of the seventh month in lunar calendar. The history of this festival goes back to the sixth century, and it greatly proliferated during the Tang dynasty through the spread of the tale of Mulian saving his mother from hell. Stephen Teiser explains that the *yulanpen* festival reveals the synthesis of the Chinese value of filial piety and the Buddhist notions of karma and offerings to monks. In Qing Jiangnan, the *yulanpen* festival was one of the regular annual festivals observed during Zhongyuan (the fifteenth day of the seventh month). As seen from the example of Tongrentang, several charities and public burial institutions sponsored the festival. For *yulanpen*, see Stephen Teiser, "Ghosts and Ancestors in Medieval Chinese Religion: The Yü-lan-p'en Festivals as Mortuary Ritual," *History of Religions* 26 (1986): 47-67. For the narrative of Mulian saving his mother, see *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang*, translated by Beata Grant and Wilt Idema (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 35-146.

By 1844, Tongrentang provided a comprehensive range of services for its urban constituents, not only the dead but also the living. Publishing this kind of material was likely a part of Tongrentang's effort to build and maintain a reciprocal relationship with the surrounding community. By publicizing the records of donation and how the budget was used, Tongrentang conceivably created a virtual community in which living and dead populations of the city were brought together in a web of mutual benevolence.

IV. From Unburied to Unclaimed: The Logic of Sorting Out *Wuzhuzhe*

How did Shanghai residents perceive Tongrentang's services for the dead? In particular, how did people feel about having their family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers buried in Tongrentang's cemeteries? Or, what did it feel like to prepare oneself to join other miscellaneous dead bodies in a crowded public cemetery? It is difficult to answer these questions, for such sources as gazetteer records or an account book rarely pay attention to the beneficiaries of the services. As for this question, scholars have tended to rely on a rather monolithic assumption that most of the beneficiaries would have been the impoverished segment or the lowest rung in the community, such as migrant laborers, vagrants, beggars, and children. Such an assumption might seem reasonable, but may not be accurate. The beneficiaries of charitable burial were normally called *wuzhuzhe* 無主者, literally meaning the dead without a *zhu* 主 (claimer, possibly meaning families or relatives who were responsible for claiming the body). Thus, *wuzhuzhe* is often translated as "unclaimed bodies." The opposite of *wuzhuzhe* was called *youzhuzhe* 有主者, meaning the dead with a claimer – or, claimed bodies. While it sounds logical that the unclaimed dead constituted the bulk of beneficiaries of public burial, the term *wuzhuzhe* is highly abstract and ambiguous, making it difficult to specify where these bodies

were from and why they remained unclaimed. Furthermore, calling these bodies unclaimed makes the unclaimed condition natural, without defining what the unclaimed condition exactly means. As the following discussion reveals, however, *wuzhuzhe* was a constructed category through which charities sorted out what they perceived as the unclaimed dead from among a stack of unburied bodies.

Burying a dead body in a cemetery was qualitatively different from providing "proper burial" to the dead in his or her own grave. Normally, proper burial included a series of sophisticated rituals that were designed to stabilize the soul and to settle the body in the final resting place.[42] This set of actions was called *zang* 葬, while interring bodies in a public cemetery was normally called *mai* 埋. Rebecca Nedostup distinguishes the two terms, explaining that *mai* is the "naked act of putting something under ground" while *zang* refers to "interring them properly, at home, with ritual." In other words, by means of elaborate ritual performances that reinstated the dead in the family, the "real" burial was distinguished from the simple act of interment. De Groot made a similar point in his observations of burial customs in Amoy, noting that *mai* indicated "burying without observance of the customary rites" and normally occurred for the interment of "only the very poorest."[43] Charitable burial was called *mai* (*yanmai*) instead of *zang* because burying the dead in a public cemetery was not a part of transforming the dead into an ancestor. In other words, simple interment (*mai*) of bodies in a public cemetery was likely done mostly for the purpose of getting rid of unburied dead bodies that long had been accumulated in the local community to the point where the locals were no longer able to stand

[42] Naquin, "Funerals in North China," 38-46.

[43] Rebecca Nedostup, "Burying, Repatriating, and Leaving the Dead in Wartime and Postwar China and Taiwan, 1937-1955," *Journal of Chinese History* 1 (2017): 121; De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 362.

these corpses. Therefore, physically getting the body into the ground was more important than the ritual function of interment. That being said, charities did offer regular sacrifices during the annual ghost festival in order to console the souls that could not go back home. Therefore, being buried in a public cemetery brought the dead into a new relationship with the surrounding community: while these dead failed to become ancestors buried at home, they were members of the collective death management regime in which charities assumed the role of alterative caretaker.

Several charities that emerged in the early nineteenth century strove to regularize public burial by making it an annual event. Charities planned mass collection and burial of unburied bodies around the time of popular ancestor worship or grave sweeping – such as Qingming (fifteenth day from the Spring Equinox, normally early April) or Zhongyuan (fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month). As these times approached, charities sorted out unclaimed bodies from among the bodies left unburied, exposed, and without care in the locality. Once the bodies were confirmed to be without families or caretakers, charities classified these bodies as "unclaimed" (*wuzhu*) and transferred those to public cemeteries.

Two examples illustrate the procedure of collecting bodies. Tongshantang in Chuansha subprefecture (*ting* 廳), Jiangsu, regulated that the regular mass burial took place in the third and ninth months every year. When these dates approached, village heads or families were asked to report the whereabouts of unburied coffins to Tongshantang. Then, the manager of Tongshantang issued a registration number and recorded it. Once confirmed, the coffin was brought to the cemetery. Thus, villagers and neighbors worked as informants who could testify how long the coffin had been placed at the spot and whether or not there was a family that regularly looked after the coffin. Once the report reached Tongshantang, it dispatched staff or local functionaries

to inspect the coffin and confirmed its unclaimed status. Then, Tongshantang would bring the body to its cemetery, encoffin it if the body was left without a coffin or the coffin was damaged, and bury it. Tongshantang would cover the fee for transformation and burial, up to 500 copper cash per coffin.[2]

Similarly, Tongrentang in Zhuli announced the collection of unburied bodies beforehand, and any lack of response to the announcement on the part of the family would make the body unclaimed. Tongrentang carried out the regular collection and burial of unburied coffins at Qingming and Dala (the twelfth month). A month before the designated dates, Tongrentang inspected the area and placed a written notice stating "collected by Tongrentang" on each unburied coffin. These coffins were buried in Tongrentang's cemeteries within a month unless the family came to claim and collect. Thus, if a family that did not want to have a coffin buried in Tongrentang's cemetery, it had to remove the coffin when notified. The movement of bodies in and out of Tongrentang's cemetery was recorded in a record book (*ce* 冊). If the body was identifiable, Tongrentang issued a number, inscribed it on a brick, and placed the brick on top of the coffin. If the body was unidentified, Tongrentang prepared two halves of a brick each inscribed with a number: one would be placed in the original place of disposal, and the other would be put on the burial spot in a cemetery. The number was recorded in the record book, so that the family could find the coffin based on this number when coming to offer sacrifices.[3]

In these two cases, being claimed or unclaimed depended on whether the family was able to collect the body and provide burial on its own when it was required, rather than on whether the family existed or not. Thus, we can assume that, aside from the bodies whose families managed to claim them in a timely manner, certain bodies would have had families but were

brought to the cemetery because the families were far away, or the families were not aware of the collection of the body, or the family could not arrange burial on its own when notified.

Thus, the beneficiaries of charitable burial were far from a homogenous group, although they were monolithically called unclaimed bodies. A cemetery was conceivably a site where various "kinds" of dead people were buried together; and this may have been particularly disturbing to the family that had no choice but to send the deceased family member to a public cemetery because of circumstances. These dead bodies, still having a tie with surviving family members, were not supposed to belong to a public cemetery.

A key question is how many beneficiaries of charitable burial did in fact have attachment to a family. I cannot provide a definitive answer at this point, but I should stress that they were significant enough to push charities to carefully distinguish different groups of corpses. For instance, when establishing a new public cemetery in Yongjia county, Zhejiang province, the county magistrate stipulated through regulations that the cemetery was primarily the resting place for the unclaimed dead (*wuzhuzhe*) who had been left without interment and decomposed above ground. Claimed bodies (*youzhuzhe*) were allowed to enter the cemetery only when their families were impoverished. The unclaimed bodies would be collected regularly from among coffins left on streets or in fields, including "small coffins of dead children" and "rotten and exposed old cadavers." The cemetery also received corpses left on the street without coffins, such as those of beggars. Therefore, the unclaimed dead were categorically different from the impoverished dead (who were brought by their families) and other anonymous corpses. The regulations further stress that the unclaimed dead must be the primary beneficiary of the

cemetery space, and thus, "the claimed dead should not be brought [to the cemeteries] in a disorderly manner," possibly, in order to prevent *youzhuzhe* from taking up all the space.[44]

Other cemeteries took more active measures to distinguish different groups of beneficiaries by compartmentalizing the cemetery space. In other words, different categories of the dead should not be buried in the same space. For instance, Shanghai Tongshantang had separate cemeteries for couples, males, females, sojourners, bone jars, and the unidentified. Likewise, Xileitang in Suzhou kept three separated spaces: one for burying bodies with descendants (*zisun* 子孫), one for those without heirs (*wuzhuhouzhe*), and one for "beggars who died on the street." The division was hierarchical, for Tongshantang provided most delicate care to the burial of the first group so that the family did not have troubles identifying the dead and offering sacrifices. The regulations further made sure that the bodies in the second and third groups must not be buried in the site designated for the first group. Meanwhile, when burying the bodies in the first group with a prospect of being claimed by a family, Tongshantang interred the coffins lightly (only half-depth) so that the family could easily move the body out.[45] Again, charities strove to prevent different classes of people from being buried in the same place. Groups like male and female, adults and children, and those who died with a descendant and those without a descendant stood for completely different categories of people, whose deaths had different implications. By carefully allocating different spaces for different groups of dead bodies, charities conveyed to their constituents that they respected the proper place for each group of the dead. Angela Leung remarked that charities for the dead in nineteenth-century Jiangnan society were highly sensitive to keeping the boundaries between insider and outsider

[44] *Wenzhou fuzhi* (1760), 6: 25.

[45] *Zhangzhou Xianzhi* (1753), 32: 49.

(*nei wai* 內外*)*, and between good and low people (*liang jian* 良賤). She even provides an example: the Tongrentang in the town of Luodian refused to receive the bodies of vagrants during the Qianlong era; in the Daoguang era, they did receive the bodies of beggars, but only after putting the bodies in cheap coffins.[46] In other words, socioeconomic status continued to govern where and how the dead were buried in a public cemetery, constantly reproducing stratification between the beneficiaries.

The charitable burials that Shanghai Tongrentang carried out in 1844 further affirm this point. Similar to other charities, Tongrentang stipulated that mass burials take place twice a year – at Qingming and Xiayuan (in the tenth month). Its regulations stated that, around these times, the unburied coffins collected from "empty buildings, deserted fields, monasteries, temples, and Buddhist nunneries" were transferred to Tongrentang upon the report made by families, neighbors, and *baojia* 保甲. Once a coffin arrived in the cemetery, Tongrentang reimbursed the fee. The 1844 account book documented the public burials over the course of the year as follows:

[46] Leung, *Shishan yu jiaohua*, 216-219.

Table 2. The number of coffins buried in Tongrentang's cemetery in 1844

MONTH	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
Big Coffins	11	14	12	73	241	167	29	25	13	10	13	26	634
Small Coffins	2	13	6	37	204	186	49	20	13	11	10	7	558
Pine-Board Coffins	12	9	16	13	14	6	6	14	11	15	19	23	158
Coffins Moved Out	1	2	7		2			1		1	2	2	18
Coffins Moved In		4	4		2			1		1		5	17
Bone Jars						168							168
TOTAL	26	42	45	123	463	527	84	61	37	38	44	63	1,553

Big coffins and small coffins, in the simplest terms, refer to the coffins of adults and children, respectively. Bodies belonging to these two categories were already encoffined when brought to cemeteries. In contrast, the bodies that belong to the category of pine-board coffin, as discussed above, were unclaimed corpses that were left without coffins. Coffins moved out indicates the bodies that had been buried in Tongrentang's cemeteries and moved out later, while coffins moved in refers to the bodies that filled the vacancy created by the former. Bone jars refers to the bodies that were buried in bone jars instead of coffins. Thus, the categorization was made following the type of coffin – or container – in which the bodies were placed. This further

implies that Tongrentang classified the bodies based on the condition of the body when it was collected and brought to the cemeteries.

The three categories dictated the space where each coffin was buried. Sites for burying big coffins were identified by "character" (*zi* 字) and "number" (*hao* 號), while those for burying small coffins and pine-board coffins were identified by "row" (*hang* 行) and "number" each. In 1844, big coffins were buried beginning from the section with *cao*-character, then moved to the sections with the characters *mu*, *lai*, *ji*, *man*, *fang*, and *gai*, consecutively. Burial during the first four months happened only in the section with *cai*-character, filling the spots up to number 125. During the next two busy months, sections with four letters were filled. The *mu* and *lai* sections were filled during the fifth month, each section accommodating around 120 coffins. The *ji* and *man* sections were filled during the sixth month with the burial of 85 coffins. From the seventh month on, burial went back to the normal pace. The burial of small coffins and pine-board coffins was carried out in a similar way, filling one row first then moving to the next.

The monthly distribution of burials reveals a clear concentration of the workload for the categories of big coffins, small coffins, and bone Jars during the three months in the summer: the fourth, fifth, and sixth months. It appears that the bodies buried during these months were collected around the time of Qingming and buried en masse.[47] The burial of 168 bone jars in a single month – the sixth month – also implies that the massive clearing up of decomposed coffins took place as part of this seasonal mass burial. Meanwhile, the burial of pine-board coffins did not conform to the curve but took place evenly through a year.

Table 2 clearly reveals that the bodies brought to the cemetery as a result of regular collecting of unburied coffins constituted the major cohort of beneficiaries of charitable burial.

[47] Thus, unlike what the regulations state, the mass burial at Xiayuan did not seem to have occurred this year.

The coffins brought and buried during the busy season were likely *wuzhuzhe* that were determined unclaimed because of the lack of claim on the part of the family. Big coffins and small coffins buried in a cemetery during the rest of the year, meanwhile, may have been *youzhuzhe*, i.e., the dead whose families existed but were impoverished and thus had no choice but to bury their loved ones in a public cemetery. If this assumption is correct, then, in both big- and small-coffin categories, *wuzhuzhe* significantly outnumber *youzhuzhe*: there are 481 *wuzhuzhe* and 153 *youzhuzhe* in the big-coffin category, and 427 *wuzhuzhe* and 131 *youzhuzhe* in the small-coffin category. However, the distinction between *youzhuzhe* and *wuzhuzhe* may not have been that important in this case because the two were not separated by the space. Rather, the major criteria for distinguishing the dead were, first, being an adult or a child, and second, whether the dead was encoffined or not. In other words, a more important thread of classifying and separating the dead was likely whether the dead were treated decently by the family at the time of death, which was indicated by whether the body was encoffined or not. Therefore, there existed a clear hierarchy between unclaimed bodies placed in a coffin but left unburied and unclaimed bodies that were left even without a coffin.

In sum, a public cemetery was far from a monolithic space. Although the bulk of the beneficiaries buried in the cemetery would have been the poor, the dead were nevertheless stratified into finer class gradations as they entered the cemetery. Charities constantly acknowledged and reinforced the differences between these people through spatial distinction. The implications of this practice will be fully discussed in chapter 4, but here I should stress that public burial was a high-profile project that required a community-wide involvement. Even though these bodies had long remained unburied on the street, charities still had to assume that they may have belonged to some families or relatives in the locality. Inspecting and collecting

these bodies further demanded that charities carefully coordinate with local residents. Separating different groups of the dead was an attempt to preserve the decency of those who were in the higher strata within the community of the public cemetery. However, these measures had limits. Table 2 suggests that, once brought to the cemetery, it was likely that the dead would stay there forever. Only 18 coffins were moved out, presumably claimed by families – which further suggests that perhaps these were the only true *youzhuzhe.* A great majority of dead bodies buried in a public cemetery would remain unclaimed and thus displaced permanently. Therefore, although the purpose of arranging a public cemetery was to provide a home to the homeless dead, this charitable institution ironically perpetuated the homeless status of those people.

V. Conclusion: The Paradox of Benevolence

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, charities like Tongrentang played a crucial role in establishing the institution of public cemeteries and expanding public death management. Charitable activities that emerged in this period foresaw the rise of public activism that came into full bloom during the post-Taiping recovery in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Taking care of unburied dead bodies provided a major avenue through which charities could build and claim public leadership in the local community. The source of their authority as public death managers lay in the impressive amount of resources amassed under their charitable cause. These resources enabled charities to regularize the inspection and collection of unburied dead bodies, through which they were able to penetrate deeply into the local deathscape.

In expanding their activities and resource base, charities often worked in coordination with the local government. Prefects, magistrates, and other government officials often appeared

to have been generous donors of resources. It seems that the model of state-society cooperation did work to facilitate the rise and expansion of public cemeteries in the Jiangnan area, at least in the formative period.

It is important to think about what this state-society cooperation meant. As discussed in chapter 2, the state had a clear ideological commitment to promoting proper burial, although the imperial government was not very successful in enforcing it by judicial means. In the field of public burial, the state was not present as a monolithic actor orchestrated by the central government. Instead, we can see several instances of individual officials expressing support in various degrees. Thus, the participation of state officials in local public burial may have taken place mostly out of their own private initiatives or commitments to enhancing the trend of proper burial in the locality where they served. Chen Hongmou was one of these state officials who were personally committed to reforming social customs. He was also known for his zealous efforts to reform burial customs, as illustrated in an anecdote in 1760 when he, as the governor of Jiangsu, sponsored burial of exposed dead bodies in Suzhou. Discussing how Chen allocated the formal government budget to support public burial in Suzhou, William Rowe assessed that Chen's patronage of local charitable burial was a way to make charities "agents in the service of state-defined goals."[48] In other words, Chen, as a state official, was committed to reforming local burial customs, and for this purpose, he actively sought to utilize local public agents like charities by financially sponsoring their tasks. The proliferation of local public burial projects, at least in this case, originated from the initiative of an official who ardently sought to fasten the ideological control over society. In the context of the eighteenth century, when state bureaucracy actively interfered in the way local societies functioned, charities were the institutions through

[48] Rowe, *Saving the World*, 372.

which the state actor could participate in local burial problems. Therefore, I think the rise of public cemeteries was a localized way of "responding" to the imperial ideology of proper burial. Although the actual administrative presence of state officials may have been limited, local public actors did share the imperial anxiety of local burial problems and were willing to take part in addressing them.

The interplay between ideology and local civic activism was also evident in other areas of public services, such as widow homes. Beginning to emerge in the Jiangnan area in the late eighteenth century, these institutions were the gentry-led response to the increase of violence and crime against women and girls – such as selling and kidnapping women, and female infanticide – within the context of growing crime, poverty, and chaos that troubled Jiangnan in the late eighteenth century. This public aid for marginalized women further expanded in the late nineteenth century in Jiangnan as part of the post-Taiping rehabilitation. Furthermore, similar institutions spread into Tianjin, a treaty-port city that was occupied by soldiers, gangsters, and hucksters, in response to an increasingly predatory environment that victimized women.[49] Therefore, this peculiar kind of welfare institution emerged out of the "deep-seated anxiety of the elite classes over the preservation of Confucian virtue in a period of increasing social violence."[50] Angela Leung and Ruth Rogaski both remark that the problem of commodification and abuse of females was a potent symbol of social disorder that deeply troubled gentry elites and philanthropists. Through establishing and spreading these institutions, elite philanthropists strove to reassert Confucian morality and bring marginalized women back into the family system. For instance, a number of widow homes operating in Jiangnan in the eighteenth century adopted

[49] Angela Leung, "To Chasten Society: The Development of Widow Homes in the Qing, 1773-1911," *Late Imperial China* 14 (1993): 1-32; Ruth Rogaski, "Beyond Benevolence: A Confucian Women's Shelter in Treaty-Port China," *Journal of Women's History* 8 (1997): 54-90.

[50] Leung, "To Chasten Society," 2.

a strict reclusive policy, restricting the inmates' contact with the outside world, which Leung interprets as an attempt to "recreate a social milieu not dissimilar from that of a proper Confucian family" where widows could fulfill their familial obligations. Rogaski makes a similar remark that the goal of an orphanage that existed in late nineteenth-century Tianjin was to protect women from the "predation of unscrupulous men" and find husbands for them, which would prevent these women from being exposed to the same violence and predation. For this reason, Rogaski assesses that the orphanage was "perhaps the largest matchmaking business in Tianjin."[51] Therefore, in these cases, charitable activities for displaced women had a clear goal of restoring family ethics in the context of the rapid breakdown of familial system. The public activism in part was an effort to restore social ethics by introducing alternative social institutions that could assist marginalized people, bringing these people back to a social safety net.

The public aid for unburied dead bodies examined in this chapter emerged in a similar trajectory. Unburied dead bodies epitomized displaced individuals who needed a social safety net to rest in peace. By the eighteenth century, for the majority of Qing elites, unburied dead bodies became an unequivocal sign of disorder caused by the deterioration of familial ethics. These dead were mostly ordinary people, who may have been rich or poor, but who did not deserve abandonment in the afterlife. Their bodies left above ground demonstrated more than the misfortune of an individual; they exemplified the failure of family and of society. Charities were the alternative caretakers of these bodies, preventing them from being wandering ghosts.

Scholars have generally acknowledged the almost ubiquitous presence of public cemeteries in the late imperial period, which they saw as a hallmark of benevolence. However, only a few scholars have attempted to contextualize charity for the dead, explaining how and

[51] Rogaski, "Beyond Benevolence," 77.

why these public commitments to the dead flourished in this period. For instance, Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke observed the burgeoning of infant burial initiatives around a similar time span – starting off around the mid-eighteenth century, and growing into full bloom in the nineteenth century – promoted by both the imperial government and local elites, which bespeaks the growing awareness of infant mortality as a social problem that required public intervention.[52] Likewise, Angela Leung examined the rise of free coffin provisions and burial support activities in the early nineteenth century. Leung identified one of the reasons for this increase of charity as the general increase of dislocated populations – migrants, refugees, and victims of natural disasters – during the first half of the nineteenth century.[53] Therefore, previous works on public charities for the dead have more or less examined a specific group(s) of marginalized people that increasingly became a social problem. Christian Henriot summarizes this viewpoint as follows: "charity graveyards represented the least attractive and most debased form of burial…where the poor, the homeless, the exposed bodies, the unknown bodies were buried."[54] In other words, public cemeteries were undesirable and unattended places for the dead ostracized and marginalized.

While this statement may have some truth in it, my impression is that the range of beneficiaries was somewhat larger than these exceptionally and obviously unfortunate people. In other words, I would like to stress the possibility that public burial was becoming a matter of everyday governance of local communities rather than exceptional events of mortality. Charities increasingly claimed themselves as civic actors that were dedicated to fulfilling community needs, and for this purpose, it was important that they provided regular and stable services. One

[52] Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, "Cradle to Grave."

[53] Leung, *Shishan yu jiaohua,* 216-219.

[54] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 152.

of the urgent community needs these charities were able to resolve was the fact that increasing number of families – either originating from the locality or having hailed from outside – were not able to provide proper burial to the deceased. Therefore, collecting and burying unburied dead bodies was not simply "getting rid of" unwanted bodies but providing a resting place to former – and current – community members. Therefore, they were the civilian agent that strove to materialize the imperial combat against the "vulgar customs" under the banner that all dead – particularly those homeless – deserved a home. The banner of benevolence was the most feasible framework that materialized the imperial ideology of public burial.

However, this framework of benevolence could work only by redefining unburied bodies as the unclaimed dead. Charities had to declare that unburied dead bodies were the marginalized dead alienated from their families and therefore "deserved" public charity. Furthermore, by asking the family to claim the dead in a timely manner, charities made themselves an arbiter that determined the claimed and unclaimed dead based on their judgement regarding which families were both capable and willing to fulfill their duty to the dead. The imperative of dealing with unburied bodies – either for a moral reason or for public benefit – empowered the public sector to intervene in the familial tie between the living and the dead. Therefore, public burial was about much more than reforming burial customs; it was about how to adjust the family-based system of burial duty in a way that was compatible with the imperial ideological precept and public interests. Chapter 4 will continue discussing this paradox of charities for the dead, focusing on its ramification in the context of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 4: Guarding the Dead's Home

Controversies Over Public Cemeteries in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai

I. Introduction: Urbanization and the Fate of Dead Bodies

What was the impact of public death management that burgeoned in the Jiangnan area around the turn of the nineteenth century? One simple answer – rather negative and, possibly, misleading – is that things did not change that much. Unburied dead bodies continued to turn up in roads, fields, and random empty sites. All the way up to the early twentieth century, local magistrates continued to issue prohibitions against exposing dead bodies. In fact, the Republican regime inherited this problem and had to continue the struggle of suppressing this disturbing, "vulgar" death custom. Policy-wise, the last several decades of the Qing did not produce any groundbreaking solution to free the living from the morbid presence of corpses.[1] The other way to interpret this resilient presence of dead bodies above ground, however, is to ask how deeply these bodies were embedded in the governance, administration, and everyday life of cities, towns, and villages up until the beginning of the modern era. Getting rid of these bodies was simply neither feasible nor desirable. Dead bodies continued to coexist with the living.

The latter half of the nineteenth century, however, did not provide a very hospitable condition. The social landscape in the Jiangnan area – and Shanghai in particular – went through

[1] Christian Henriot, who has done an extensive research on the transformation of death and burial in Shanghai throughout the twentieth century, remarks that "the Chinese authorities did not regulate the issue of burial grounds until the 1920s." Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 144.

enormous transformations upon several events that fundamentally shook the stability of Qing governance, such as the defeat in the Opium War and the resultant opening of treaty ports, and the Taiping Rebellion that devastated several areas in Jiangnan for over a decade. Shanghai was one of the cities that was most severely affected by these events. Being one of the treaty port cities opened to Britain upon the Treaty of Nanjing, Shanghai rapidly transformed into a global arena where imperial powers competed with each other, the impact of which began to unfold clearly and visibly from the 1850s on. The formation of foreign settlements in Shanghai, and the gradual expansion of the settlements over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century, significantly altered the social, political, and economic environments as well as the demographic composition of the city. Foreigners in Shanghai – the British, the French, and Americans – established a new urban space, the International Settlement and French Concession, administered by the Municipal Council. What they brought along with them were new concepts and norms of death and burial, which fiercely conflicted with those of the Chinese. Upon the arrival of the West, Shanghai urbanized in a very complicated trajectory where violence, death, colonialism, and modernity all came altogether.

The opening of Shanghai to imperial powers invited not only foreigners but also Chinese migrants who strove to take advantage of new economic opportunities. There were already sizable sojourning populations in pre-war Shanghai sufficient enough to organize native-place associations. However, the opening of the port in Shanghai invited an explosive wave of migration from several regions. By the late nineteenth century, "more than half the population was made up of immigrants from other areas of China."[2] In order to survive in a highly competitive foreign environment, migrant groups formed associations that provided several

[2] Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

communal services, one of the most important of which was death-related services, i.e., providing coffins, funeral services, and burial services. In addition, the Small Swords Rebellion from 1851 to 1853 and the battles against the Taiping armies outside Shanghai in the early 1860s produced numerous dislocated people and refugees, making the public services of charities and guilds all the more imperative for the administration of the city. Charities and guilds immensely contributed to the recovery of the city during the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly by taking care of the interment of unclaimed dead bodies.[3]

This chapter delineates how the urbanization of Shanghai impacted the public management of death and burial throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century all the way to the first decade of the twentieth century. European ideas on public hygiene put considerable pressure on the Chinese to solve their problem of unburied bodies. However, it is also clear that Chinese public institutions were persisting in a century-long effort to find ways to dispose of dead bodies. This culminated in an intriguing argument, one made against Western authorities that cemeteries constituted public spaces that had a rightful position in the urban community of Shanghai. In this chapter, I first look at changes brought by Europeans, and the emergence of new Chinese businesses and organizations devoted to managing corpses. As shown in the first two sections, in late nineteenth-century Shanghai, there existed two contradictory approaches to the management of dead bodies. As is well known, it was a time of intense clash of cultures and norms over the issues of urban administration, and the places for the dead came to represent to foreigners a public health hazard that needed to be removed from the community of the living. Meanwhile, there were growing quantities of public facilities designed to aid the urban population – a good portion of them being migrant workers – to prepare for the afterlife by

[3] For the history of Shanghai before the opening of the port, see Johnson, *Shanghai*. For the post-Opium War transformation of Shanghai, see Goodman, *Native Place*.

depositing dead bodies until their final burial was arranged. Therefore, while foreigners introduced and implemented their notions of the place for the dead and a set of sanitary regulations, the Chinese expanded their own systems of death management; and conflicts were inevitable as the territories of these two communities converged spatially. The third section discusses several instances of conflict that revolved around the meaning of dead bodies and the space designed to protect corpses, focusing on how these disputes culminated in arguments about what constituted public property. I stress that these disputes over cemeteries reveal how the Chinese in Shanghai ascribed values to the collective space for the deceased urban population.

II. Colonial Regulations of Death and Burial

The European imperial domination of China in the latter half of the nineteenth century took place in a distinct form of semi-colonialism, that is, the colonial presence around foreign settlements where foreigners were allowed to exercise extraterritorial rights. The foreign settlements developed into an enclave where they expressed colonial modernity through various means. One of the dominant frameworks that shaped the environment of semi-colonial cities was hygiene. Altering the living environment by means of hygiene and public health shaped the broad context in which dead bodies were entangled with the politics of colonialism, urbanization, and modernity. The discourse of public health delegitimized the existing organization of urban space and further defined dead bodies as a public health hazard.

The key premise of hygienic modernity was that the systematic sanitation and disease control were the hallmark of advanced civilization of the West, which clearly contrasted with the unclean, odorous space of the colonized. In her case study of Tianjin, a hyper-colonial city occupied by eight different imperial powers, Ruth Rogaski argues that the colonial rule in

Tianjin hinged on the notion of hygiene (*weisheng* 衛生), a concept along which several boundaries were created: not only between the colonizer and the colonized, but also among the colonial powers themselves.[4] Hygiene was particularly important during epidemic outbreaks, for colonizers found the source of infectious diseases from "unsanitary" ways of living of the colonized. In colonial Hong Kong, for example, British medical officials diagnosed that the plague outbreak of 1894 originated from the filthy living environments and customs of the poor underclass Chinese. As a result, plague prevention measures revolved around the "sanitizing campaign in poor districts, to detain victims, and to maintain the strict segregation between 'natives' and Europeans."[5] Likewise, in Shanghai, the growth of foreign settlements demanded enhanced administrative efforts to control health hazards. Xuelei Huang argues that the British and French efforts to regulate the city focused on removing "malodorous matters," such as wasteland, marches, cesspools, swamps, carcasses, and excrement – thus, making the foreigners' living space "less dusty, higher, and drier."[6] Clearing these up from foreign settlements was a priority of colonial administration, as well as a way colonizers differentiated themselves from the Chinese.

The perceived lack of regulation of death and burial in Chinese districts in the vicinity of Shanghai was one of the striking features remarked on by foreigners. Several European authors were astonished by dead bodies, coffins, and graveyards scattered in villages, mountains, fields, or in the street. An article in the *North China Herald* China as "one huge burying-ground…It

[4] Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 119-139.

[5] Carol Benedict, *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 143.

[6] Xuelei Huang, "Deodorizing China: Odour, Ordure, and Colonial (Dis)order in Shanghai, 1840s-1940s," *Modern Asian Studies* 50 (2016): 1092-1122; Kerrie MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes: The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai, 1843-1893* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 267.

appears that the antiquity of the 'Flowery Land' is amply vouched for by the remains of the population who have been deposited, generation after generation, in the place where they lived, like dead lives in a primeval forest."[7] The disposal of children's bodies in the so-called "baby towers" – building structures used for the disposal of infant corpses, without any interment – further demonstrated the tie between exposed corpses and the unfathomable, for some, custom of infanticide.[8] In these people's understanding, dead bodies and old graves scattered around fields, mountains, and villages surrounding the walled city were an unequivocal source of malodorous matters that made conditions sores for the living. Almost every western observer who encountered exposed dead bodies mentioned the smell and miasma emanating from decomposing corpses.[9] As discussed in detail in a later section, foreigners' revulsion of dead bodies frequently developed into open conflicts.

Europeans' fear of dead bodies decomposing on the ground was in line with their own recent experience of restructuring city spaces in their home countries. During the nineteenth century, there was a gradual movement in several European countries to strictly separate spaces for the living from those for the dead. For instance, Paris and London witnessed a major transition of the place for the dead from parish gravesites located inside cities to extramural cemeteries. The hero in this narrative, Edwin Chadwick, the leading sanitary reformer in London in the late nineteenth century, identified dead bodies as one of the sources that created foul smell causing diseases. In his view, "all interments in town, where bodies decompose, contributed to the mass of atmospheric impurity which is injurious to the public health." This understanding

[7] March 13, 1852, *North China Herald*.

[8] Several western observers perceived baby towers as "slaughterhouse" or "frightful murder-house" where infants were virtually "thrown alive…and left to die at the leisure on the heaps of putrid bodies below." Snyder-Reinke, "Cradle to Grave"; King, *Between Birth and Death*, 77-110.

[9] Huang, "Deodorizing China," 1097; Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*, 114.

originated from miasmic theory, an influential medical idea of the age, according to which "decay contaminate the air with miasma, and miasma caused disease by introducing decay in the bodies of those who breathed it."[10] He further contended that the urban environment was far more vulnerable to epidemic outbreaks than rural areas because there were large quantities of decomposing matter in cities, including church graveyards that long had been packed with overcrowded dead bodies.[11] The extramural rural cemeteries that came to replace urban churchyard graves represented a new vision of the space for the dead, effectively segregated from the living and crowded urban centers, while converting graveyards into what we might now call 'eco-friendly' public gardens or playgrounds that were instrumental to enhancing the health of the urbanites.[12]

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several societies in Asia accommodated this logic of separating the dead's space from the living. In colonial Singapore, for example, the Chinese burial grounds and graves scattered in the highlands at the fringe of the city were increasingly perceived as "both insanitary and obstructive to modern urban development."[13] The contestation between colonial authorities and Chinese communities over the disposal of the dead prompted the legislation of the Burials Bill in 1887, which declared that Chinese burial grounds were now subject to a set of bureaucratic regulations. In particular, building a grave required the family to obtain license from the city government in order to

[10] Peter Thorsheim, "The Corpse in the Garden: Burial, Health, and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century London," *Environmental History* 16 (2011): 40-41.

[11] Thomas Lacqueur estimates that "In 1840, dead humans contributed roughly 2,000 tons of rotting flesh in London." Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 221.

[12] Peter Thorsheim, "The Corpse in the Garden," 38-68; Joy Giguere, "Too Mean to Live, and Certainly in No Fit Condition to Die: Vandalism, Public Misbehavior, and the Rural Cemetery Movement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38 (2018): 293-324.

[13] Brenda Yeoh, "The Control of 'Sacred' Space: Conflicts over the Chinese Burial Grounds in Colonial Singapore, 1880-1930," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 22 (1991): 287.

prevent the alienation of land suitable for building houses and roads.[14] In Japan, similar attempts of regulation appeared in the decade after the 1868 Meiji Restoration, as a part of a comprehensive program to reform death practices. The regulation of burial particularly addressed the concerns of public health and land use efficiency. Burial space was restricted as the creation of private graves and cemeteries now required government approval. Furthermore, from the 1880s on, the government stipulated that "graveyards be built more than 109 yards from residences and not located alongside highways, railroads, and rivers."[15] In other words, the government imposed a strict and unitary rule for the disposal of bodies. Furthermore, the Japanese soon brought this framework to Korea upon its colonization of the peninsula, promulgating in 1912 the Rules on Gravesite, Crematorium, Burial and Cremation Regulation. Following the regulation, "only regional governments could create public cemeteries with a little exception of private burial grounds" and "burial outside of designated public cemeteries were strictly prohibited."[16]

In Chinese treaty port cities, it appears that attempts to regulate death and burial predominantly focused on clearing up corpses and graves from foreign settlements. In Tianjin, after the city was occupied by eight imperial powers that aided the Qing government in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, the Tianjin Provisional Government (the governing body of the city composed of the imperial powers present in Tianjin) carried out several sanitary measures that included the collection and interment of casualties caused by the Boxers and the following "modernization" of the way that Tianjin buried the dead. Here, the Department of

[14] Yeoh, "The Control of 'Sacred' Space," 287-291.

[15] Bernstein, *Modern Passings,* 113.

[16] Hyang A Lee, "Managing the Living through the Dead: Colonial Governmentality and the 1912 Burial Rules in Colonial Korea," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 27 (2014): 410-1.

Public Health (*weisheng bu* 衛生部) was responsible for removing old coffins buried outside the city walls and burying those in new "modern native cemeteries" in accordance with a rule of "six feet under."[17] In Shanghai, three cemeteries for foreigners were created within concessions during the first couple of decades after the opening of the port. Managed by the Municipal Council, these cemeteries were exclusively for foreigners – no Chinese bodies allowed. In 1871, twenty-six years after the beginning of foreign settlements, the Municipal Council created the post of health officer, whose job was "forcible removal of noxious accumulations, purification of unwholesome buildings, drains, and cesspools, and aid in reclamation of land bordering waterways."[18] These people were also responsible for removing exposed corpses (presumably, those of the Chinese) or corpses kept in private houses outside the settlements for burial.[19]

When it came to the regulation of death and burial, colonial modernity hinged on delegitimizing the presence of dead bodies within the living's community. Foreigners in China introduced techniques for implementing this vision of urban space through the everyday administration of foreign settlements. The regulations of death and burial implemented in foreign settlements, however, represent only a single facet of how the Chinese deathscape was influenced by the introduction of colonial modernity.

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[17] Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*, 174-5.

[18] MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes*, 132.

[19] That said, the public health regime of the colonial government does not seem to have been good enough to bring the management of dead bodies under control. According to Christian Henriot, throughout the late nineteenth century down to the 1920s, collection of abandoned corpses in foreign concessions mostly relied on two charitable organizations, Tongren fuyuantang and the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery. When an abandoned corpse turned up, the local headmen (*dibao*) were dispatched to the site to identify the person, contact relatives, and file a report. Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 242-249.

III. Aspirations of Returning Home

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the colonial discourse of public health and hygiene by no means dominated Shanghai's deathscape. From the Chinese perspective, the latter half of the nineteenth century marked an explosive growth of public death management in Shanghai, greatly expanding the initiatives, resources, and actors pertaining to the collection and burial of dead bodies. The charitable activities for the dead in this period continued the trends that had already taken root in Shanghai earlier in the century, while the devastation caused by the Taiping Rebellion in the Jiangnan area further expanded the scope of public burial.[20] The 1884 gazetteer of Shanghai lists five charities – including Tongren fuyuantang – that were known for their services of public burial in thirteen charitable graveyards established on a total of 1,087 *mu* of land. The 1918 gazetteer lists a much larger number of charitable graveyards, a total of 74, among which 52 were still operating.[21] Another group of actors that became very prominent in the field of death management was guilds, that is, self-regulatory groups or associations that were organized following shared native places or occupations. Late nineteenth-century Shanghai in particular witnessed a conspicuous increase of guilds, as a result of the explosive growth of commercial activities and trades in the city after the Opium War. Like charities, guilds provided an extensive range of death-related services, particularly coffin homes and local burial.[22] However, unlike charities, these guild services were arranged specifically for the members of the

[20] For instance, Guoyutang, a prominent charity in Shanghai active throughout the mid and late nineteenth century, established public cemeteries (33 *mu* large, all together) for the refuges from Suzhou in 1861. Yu Zhi, *Deyilu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 2001), 8: 14-15. For the burial of Taiping victims, see Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in Nineteenth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 99-134.

[21] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 152.

[22] It is important to note here that, by guild, I am not referring to a specialized mortuary guild, i.e., a guild specializing in the mortuary business. The guilds discussed in this chapter are either native-place organizations or certain occupational organizations that provided a diverse range of services including death-related ones.

guilds, and coffin homes and local burial sites were designed not as a permanent resting place but as a temporary site of disposing of the dead until the family could arrange transportation of the body back home for burial. In a sense, these facilities aimed to fulfill the aspiration of postmortem homecoming of the members. Therefore, the other face of urbanizing Shanghai in the late nineteenth century was the increasing public facilities designed to meet the needs of the newly emerging urban community. The expansion of public death management was a crucial part of Shanghai's urbanization.

Dealing with the aspiration of postmortem homecoming was one of the most crucial elements in the Chinese experience of migration in the nineteenth century. While people had long made personal efforts to bring the bodies of deceased family members back from the place of migration for burial at home, what emerged anew in the late nineteenth century was an organized and systematic form of storing and shipping bones and coffins.[23] The most well-known example comes from the transatlantic shipment of bones from San Francisco to China. Initially emerging as a service of native place associations for Chinese merchants in San Francisco, it grew into a sophisticated and institutionalized industry by the 1870s that covered the whole process of collecting, exhuming, cleaning, packing, transporting, documenting, and shipping bones of deceased Chinese laborers. The Chong How Tong, for example, was an association for immigrants from Panyu in Guangzhou, founded in 1858, and its specific function was to organize collection and shipment of bones of its members.[24] The bone shipping was

[23] For the individual cases of transporting dead bodies back home for burial, see Ellen Zhang, "How Long Did it Take to Plan a Funeral? Liu Kai's (947-1000) Experience Burying His Parents," *Frontier History of China* 13 (2018): 508-530; Steve Miles, *Upriver Journeys: Diaspora and Empire in Southern China, 1570-1850* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 2.

[24] Getting membership was crucial for making oneself eligible for the service. Every Panyu native newly arrived in America was expected to make a "donation" of $10 to the Chong How Tong, and in return, he would be issued with a receipt that would entitle him to the death services and bone shipping provided by the organization. The organization made it clear that failure to obtain the membership would make him

arranged based on the "enormous transnational mechanism" that connected Chinese merchant associations in San Francisco and another association in Hong Kong where the bones and coffins arrived and from there were distributed to the native places. The transatlantic bone-shipping industry greatly proliferated to the point that "by the mid-1890s, almost every regional group in Hong Kong had organized bone-repatriation societies" and that "large-scale repatriation of human remains became a feature of Chinese emigration to California."[25]

Compared to California, the guild service in Shanghai was concentrated more on storing coffins in or near the city rather than shipping bodies back home. According to Henriot, the guild service of shipping coffins – not bones – began to appear from the late nineteenth century on, although it remained the privilege of only a few wealthy guilds.[26] In contrast, coffin homes were often "the cornerstone of guild foundation," for "providing the dead with an adequate facility before their burial was a major concern of the guild directors" in Shanghai.[27] Coffin homes became a characteristic landscape of death in Shanghai throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. These were certainly different from the service of public burial provided by charities that these coffin homes were used to legitimately delay interment of the deceased until families arranged proper burial at home. Its proliferation reveals that guilds, the rising public

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excluded from any of these services. Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 275.

[25] Sinn, *Pacific Crossing,* 266-276. Also see Roberta Greenwood's article on a similar topic. Greenwood sheds light on the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in California that functioned as the central organizer of burial services in California, including bone collection and shipping. Greenwood further stresses that the bone shipping was far from a permanent feature of Chinese migrant society. While the repatriation of bones continued until the mid-twentieth century, it discontinued upon the establishment of PRC. Furthermore, as Chinese migration into America became active in the 1970s and 1980s, "the direction of the dead was reversed and the number of burial remains shipped out of China grew steadily since the 1979s." Roberta Greenwood, "Old Rituals in New Lands: Bringing the Ancestors to America," in *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, eds. Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 248.

[26] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 76.

[27] Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 58-59.

actor in the city, came up with strategies to fulfill the aspiration of proper burial in a way radically different from the conventional model of public burial.

We have already seen an example of coffin homes in chapter 2: the facilities near West Lake in Hangzhou where a mass robbery of unburied coffins took place in the early nineteenth century. For Chinese living in crowded cities like Hangzhou and Shanghai in the nineteenth century, depositing the body in a coffin home was probably a familiar way of preparing for burial.[28] People in Shanghai were particularly inclined to do so, because several guilds provided coffin home services from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In many cases, the formation of guilds began with establishing burial grounds or coffin homes. Siming Gongsuo, a guild organization for migrants from Ningbo and Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, was one of the earliest that opened coffin homes in Shanghai.[29] The guild was set up in 1798 when it opened coffin homes, and the guild grew as it expanded death-related services to its members. Jianting Huiguan, an organization for migrants from Jianning and Tingzhou of Fujian, was established in

[28] An earlier example of coffin homes comes from the 1760 gazetteer of Wenzhou prefecture, Zhejiang, that provides a record of coffin homes built on a public cemetery site outside of the west gate of the prefectural seat. According to the record, the cemetery had long been used as a site for temporary disposal of dead bodies of migrant merchants from Dingzhou prefecture in Fuzhou. In 1750, public funds were collected to purchase about 3-mu large site and build 20 compartments (*jian* 間) of coffin homes, in addition to two buildings for offering sacrifices. According to the record, the facility was built based on the public funds raised by merchants from Tingzhou prefecture, Fujian, in order to store the coffins of those who died in the area and were not returned back. The facility was filled up quickly, and there was another wave of public donation of funds to renovate and expand the facility to 46 compartments in 1763. It was also regulated that a coffin would stay in the facility maximum 10 years if the dead had a family to return to, and 5 years if the dead did not have a family. After these terms, the coffins that remained in the facility would be burned, and the remaining bones were stored in pagoda. In other words, the regular clearing up of unclaimed bodies was an integral part of running a public facility for keeping unburied dead bodies. *Wenzhou fuzhi* (1760), 6: 25.

[29] The leading members of the guild was from the Fang family of Ningbo, and therefore, the guild was known as the Ningbo Guild. It was one of the most powerful guilds in Shanghai throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Linda Johnson, "Shanghai: An Emerging Jiangnan Port, 1683-1840," in *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, ed. Linda Johnson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 164; Goodman, *Native Place*, 158-169; Susan Mann, "The Ningpo Pang and Financial Power at Shanghai," in *The Chinese Cities Between Two Worlds*, eds. Mark Elvin and William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 73-96.

the Jiaqing reign and soon opened coffin homes (*binshe* 殯舍) in 1825. Chaohui Huiguan, consisting of the migrants from Chaoyang and Huilai in Guangdong province, was set up in 1839, operating coffin homes and communal burial sites (*congzangchu* 叢葬處). Some of the guilds that appeared in the post-Taiping era include Jiangning gongsuo, set up in 1880 with a huge complex of coffin homes of more than 100 compartments (*jian* 間), and Jiajun huiguan for migrants from Jiaxing prefecture in Zhejiang that opened coffin homes made up 40 compartments in 1906.[30] According to Henriot, three quarters of guild organizations in Shanghai surveyed in 1950 established coffin homes at the same time they built guildhalls, implying that aiding the repatriation of the remains of deceased members was a crucial purpose of organizing guilds.[31] In the cases of guilds that did not have coffin homes at the beginning phase, coffin homes were established when the guild expanded its resources and consolidated its members.

Why did such facilities designed to keep dead bodies unburied proliferate in spite of the age-old condemnation of delayed burial? More importantly, considering the European revulsion at the possible health hazard of decomposing corpses, how could these facilities continue to exist – and even expand – amidst the growing western presence in Shanghai? To be sure, these coffin homes were not illegal facilities operating covertly; these were the authorized legitimate services that many guilds considered to be their flagship service to their constituents. In asserting the legitimacy of these services, guilds had to present coffin homes as fundamentally different from other forms of temporary disposal – such as leaving coffins in a field or street only covered with dry grass.

[30] *Shanghaixian xuzhi* (1918), 3: 1-14.

[31] Goodman, *Native Place*, 9; Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 76.

Several guilds strove to operate coffin homes systematically relying on strict rules and regulations. The most important and universal rule was that the coffin home was open only to members of the guild. Guilds in general refused to accept the body of a person whose identity was unclear or who met an unnatural death. In addition, coffins made of fragile and cheap woods were also denied entry. The candidate was verified through a guarantor (*baoren* 保人); the guarantor was responsible when the identity of the dead turned out to be fake. Once coffin home managers verified its identity, the qualified corpse obtained a certificate with the name and native-place information registered in an account book. Once accepted, coffins could stay for only a limited length of time. Their permitted residence in the facility varied in duration. For example, the charter of Huining Huiguan regulates three years for adults (*daguan* 大棺) and one year for children (*xiaoguan* 小棺). For the adults, the term could be extended up to six years.[32] However, it appears that, by the turn of the twentieth century, the terms were generally shortened. In the Guangxu-era charter of Shandong Huiguan, the terms for disposing coffins in the facility are two years normally, and no longer than three years.[33]

Furthermore, most coffin homes were available only upon payment of annual fees, the price of which varied depending on the quality of the facility. In the case of Siming gongsuo, the 1916 regulation declares that there were four different grades of coffin homes: 24 *yuan* for the *te-*

[32] *Zhongguo huigaunzhi ziliao jicheng* (Fuzhou: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2013) vol.9, 488.The charter does not explain the reason for such discrepancy. Presumably, the term for children's coffins would have been shorter because the body of an adult and of a child were treated differently – as already seen from the case of Tongrentang's cemetery in 1844. Not all guilds ran a separate coffin home for children, in which case children's coffins were prohibited from entering the coffin home for adults. Henriot's investigation of coffin home data in 1930s also confirms that the number of children's coffins registered in coffin homes were generally meager compared to those of the adults. Just to give an example, at the Huzhou guild, during the period from 1932 to 1936, there were 480 coffins registered in the coffin home, which included 227 men, 167 women, and 83 children. Henriot interprets that "although small, families with a decent income were prepared to pay to store the coffin of very young children and even incur the cost of transportation for proper burial in the native village." Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 69.

[33] *Zhongguo huigaunzhi ziliao jicheng*, vol.9, 504.

grade, 20 *yuan* for the *jia*-grade, 12 *yuan* for the *yi*-grade, and 5 *yuan* for the *bing*-grade. All these facilities were available for a year, and upon the expiration of the term, the family could extend the stay one more year by paying extra fees. If the payment was not made, then the coffin was sent to the free storage facility (*tongchang* 通廠), kept there for another year, and was finally sent to the guild cemetery at the end of the second year.[34] Haichang gongsuo, a guild organization set up in 1899 for migrants from Haining department in Zhejiang, ran coffin homes with three different grades: the high (*shang*)-level facility only accepted two kinds of high-quality coffins (the *yuan*- and *heng*-grade) against the payment of 12 yuan and 8 yuan of annual fee each; in this facility, a single user could use the entire compartment. In the middle (*zhong*)-level facility, three *li*-grade coffins (presumably, more modest than *yuan*- and *heng*-grade coffins) shared one compartment with the payment of 4 yuan. Lastly, the common(*tong*)-level facility received *zhen*-grade coffins (likely, cheap coffins) free of charge. It appears that these facilities were occasionally open to non-members as well, although non-members had to pay higher prices: 30 *yuan* for the *yuan* grade, 20 *yuan* for the *heng* grade, and 10 *yuan* for the *li* grade. Non-members were prohibited from entering the common-grade facility, except for 1903 when it was temporarily opened to non-members against the payment of 4 yuan. This rule was repealed a year later as the free facilities were packed up rapidly.[35]

The highly stratified system of coffin homes imply that these facilities were not available to every member on an egalitarian basis. Coffin homes only accepted coffins in good condition – good enough to endure for a certain duration of time without deterioration – and from families that could afford good-quality coffins and the annual usage fee. Furthermore, several guilds

[34] *Zhongguo huigaunzhi ziliao jicheng*, vol.9, 538.

[35] *Zhongguo huigaunzhi ziliao jicheng*, vol.9, 551-5.

refused to accept those who died abruptly or without clear identity. Coffin homes were for the "known" dead, with a certified potential of a family's claim in the near future. Therefore, as Henriot remarks, "storing coffins in a repository was reserved to the more affluent members of guilds…most sojourners were excluded from this service."[36] Coffin homes were envisioned to be a clean, well-managed, orderly space for the respectable dead. Storing the bodies of these people in coffin homes was different from the usual case of delayed burial that often left the body exposed or abandoned.

As indicated in the above regulations, the regular removal of old coffins from the facility was imperative for the good maintenance and smooth operation of coffin homes. In principle, bodies remaining unclaimed after the expiration of the term were transferred to the local cemetery and buried there. One reason for this was that, during most of the nineteenth century, guilds did not provide transportation services. According to Henriot, advertisements for coffin shipping began to be placed in local newspapers (*Shenbao*) from the late nineteenth century on by such prominent guilds as the Zhe-Shao guild (organized by the migrants from Zhejiang province) and the Dongting guild (organized by the migrants from Suzhou), while Siming gongsuo – one of the most powerful native-place associations in Shanghai – embarked on the regular shipment of coffins in 1909 as it made a contract with shipping companies to ship 400 coffins annually.[37] Therefore, until the guilds came up with business strategies for coffin shipping, families were mostly responsible for arranging transportation.

Transferring unclaimed coffins from a coffin home to a cemetery, however, appears to have been a struggle. While there is no systematic record tracing the movement of coffins deposited in a coffin home, a number of materials suggest that coffins were frequently

[36] Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 60.

[37] Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 76-78.

accumulated in the facility far beyond the expiration date. Getting rid of those overdue coffins often took place when coffin homes were full and thus unmanageable. For instance, the Guang-Zhao guild had 8,000 coffins stored in the repository in 1882, and in 1887 it issued a public notice that coffins that had remained at the premises for more than six years – the maximum length – should be retrieved by the relevant families. Notices published in the late 1880s demanded the removal of coffins that had been kept in the facility "during the Tongzhi reign" (1862-1875) – presumably, these coffins stayed in the facility for over a decade.[38] In 1885, Siming gongsuo attempted to repatriate the coffins of Yongjiang (a county included in the Ningbo prefecture) natives that had been accumulated in coffin homes. Here, in spite of the rule of "returning (to the native place) after three years," there had accumulated "more than a hundred coffins" left in the facility for several years. The guild announced that it would provide transportation fees up to 5,000 *wen* for the returning of each coffin to its family in Yongjiang. However, the subsequent report complains that very few families responded to the call and the facilities were still full.[39]

Overall, coffin homes constituted a distinct urban landscape of Shanghai in the late nineteenth century. In particular, coffin homes reveal how the existing model of public death management evolved to meet new expectations and aspirations in the context of rapid urbanization. The system of coffin homes was an outgrowth of the existing practice of keeping coffins for burial at home, with a more refined system of regulation and management. It was intended to furnish highly refined and costly facilities designed to give proper – if temporary –

[38] Henriot, *Scythe and the City,* 71. The Guang-Zhao guild was a native-place association consisted of people from Guangzhou and Zhaoqing prefectures in Guangdong. Before the Opium War, these merchants dealt in foreign goods and sundries; after the War, they expanded their activities dealing with foreigners, as house-servants, clerks, cooks, compradors and linguists. Goodman, *Native Place*, 59.

[39] April 30, 1885, *Shenbao.*

homes to the deceased. In fulfilling the aspiration of proper burial at home, however, coffin homes provided spaces where dead bodies legitimately stayed without interment. In other words, the system of coffin homes did not prioritize timely interment, and thus, it went against the precept of proper burial promoted by the imperial government (as discussed in chapter 2) and public burial enterprise (as discussed in chapter 3). The proliferation of these facilities in late nineteenth-century Shanghai indicates that taking care of the afterlife of newly emerging urban population was an essential component of public service and urban administration, which required a remarkable degree of flexibility. In actively responding to the aspiration of postmortem homecoming, public actors creatively interpreted what was proper for the deceased.

IV. "This is Our Property!"

What, then, did these spaces of collective and temporary disposal mean to the people in Shanghai? The irony is that these coffin homes and cemeteries were supposed to be a temporary resting place, not the permanent burial site, although the vast majority of people laid in these places presumably ended up permanently staying there. In other words, there was a certain anxiety that these collective spaces were not the "real" home but something that might end up being a permanent home. Therefore, for the philanthropists and guild leaders who built and managed these facilities, it was important to make sure that the bodies disposed of in these facilities did not get lost, abandoned, exposed, and become wandering ghosts. The proper maintenance of these facilities was pivotal for the continuing attachment of these bodies to their living family members – either in their hometown or in their place of migration, Shanghai. In other words, there emerged a new sense of belonging or attachment channeled through these collective and temporary spaces for the dead. This new sense of belonging was most clearly

articulated on a number of occasions when the security of these places was threatened by the logic of public health and urban development of the imperial powers. The expansion of foreign settlements over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century inevitably brought the two contradicting notions of urban space – European imperialist and Chinese civic actors – into conflict. Often, the Chinese resisted against the foreigners' claim over the urban space by arguing that the communal spaces for the deceased urban population were public properties that belonged to the whole community. This argument implies a collective sense of responsibility to the former community members articulated through public death management.

The proliferation of the Chinese death services did not necessarily take place independently from foreign influence. Several cemeteries and coffin homes were located in the western and northern suburbs outside of the walled city, the area that was increasingly included in foreign settlements. In particular, the French Concession was established on a narrow stretch of land between the city walls and the southern border of the International Settlement that was "filled with tombs, charity graveyards, and guild graveyards."[40] Not very surprisingly, the idea of storing coffins while they awaited their eventual return home was very foreign, if not repulsive, in the eyes of foreigners. Foreigners in Shanghai were buried locally, and there appear to have been few – if any – attempts to bring the deceased's remains back to their home countries.[41] On several occasions, foreigners did not hesitate to express their abhorrence and discomfort with this

[40] Song-Chuan Chen, "The Power of Ancestors: Tombs and Death Practices in Late Qing China's Foreign Relations, 1845-1914," *Past and Present* 239 (2018): 137. Meanwhile, the International Settlement inhabited by the British and Americans was located far north of the city wall, adjacent to a small river running along its southern border and the Huangpu river on the eastern section ran along the Huangpu river, which made the area muddy and inauspicious for burial. Christian Henriot, "When the Dead Go Marching in: Cemetery Relocation and Grave Migration in Modern Shanghai," in *The Chinese Deathscape*, https://chinesedeathscape.supdigital.org/read/when-the-dead-go-marching-in

[41] Burial grounds for foreigners were first established by the private initiatives of individual residents of the settlements but were later incorporated into the Municipal Council. The Chinese were forbidden to use the sites. For the emergence of foreigners' cemeteries in Shanghai, see Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 195-220.

practice. Although public coffin homes became an integral part of the regular city life in late nineteenth-century Shanghai, running these facilities was far from smooth.

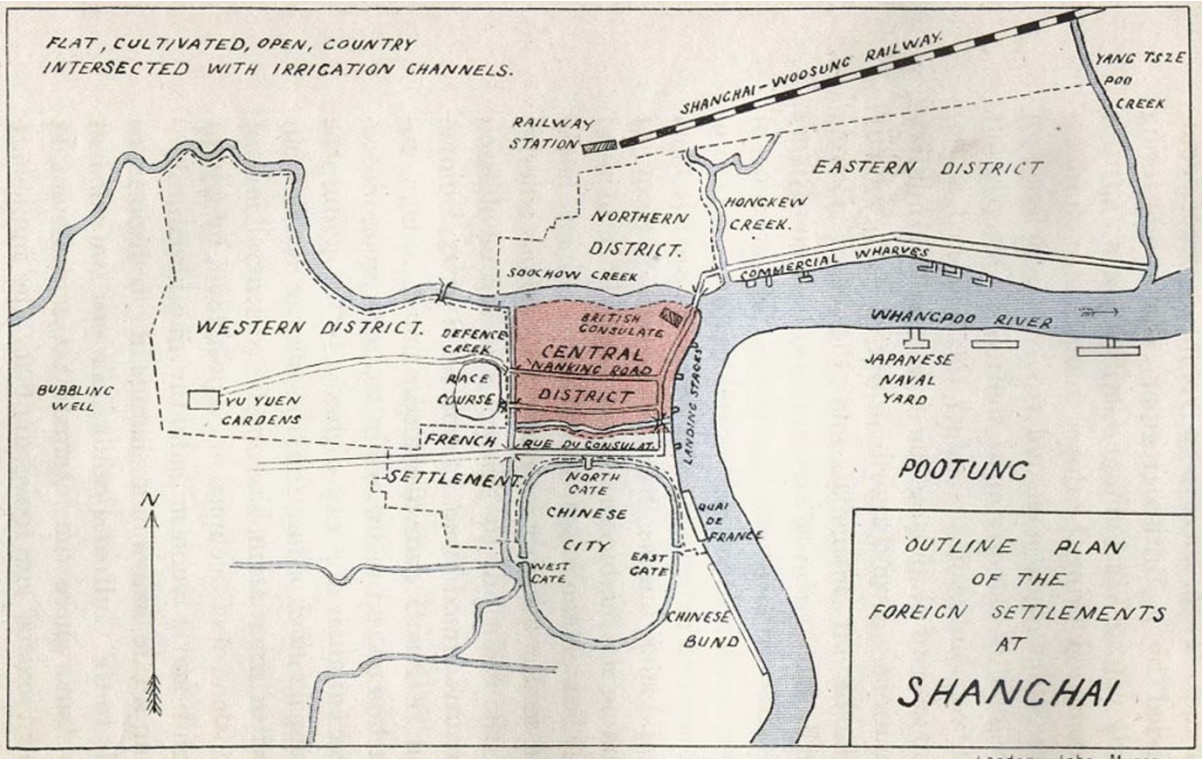

Image 3. The Chinese city and foreign settlements in Shanghai (1907)[42]

The Chinese were not indifferent to the issue of health and pollution associated with dead bodies. The Chinese in fact had a similar understanding of corpses as a health hazard anchored in their own medical theory. Angela Leung summarizes the cause of epidemic outbreak in the late imperial medical theory as follows:

> The epidemic *qi* was often associated with dampness of the earth and with foul matter. A combination of filth and dampness, when steaming from the soil and mixing with unseasonable *qi*, generated epidemics. Disease-causing filth was believed to steam and

[42] https://www.virtualshanghai.net/Asset/Preview/vcMap_ID-195_No-1.jpeg

> become a poisonous and infectious haze when the weather turned warm and humid. One particular contribution of some southern Ming and Qing doctors to the idea that environmental pollution provoked epidemic *qi* was the emphasis on dead organic matter. Death, to them, was the most dangerous and polluting element.[43]

Corpses, in other words, were seen as producing the deadly polluting effect. Because of this perceived menace of exposed corpses, the swift removal of the bodies of plague victims was likely one of the well-established "plague measures" practiced in China during the Qing period.[44]

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, announcements of removing exposed coffins or bodies appeared regularly on *Shenbao*, along with warnings of the deadly pollution caused by shallowly buried coffins.[45] In 1872, *Shenbao* criticized the poor management of charitable cemeteries located outside the west gate of Shanghai (possibly laid in the French Concession) where coffins were buried in a clumsy manner – only half-depth. The editorialist further claimed that these lightly buried coffins caused foul *qi* to spread in the neighborhood and made the villagers in the area suffer. The article particularly points to the problem that the burial job was done by "the farmers in the area" hired by charities – instead of professional workers – who were not properly informed of the proper burial method.[46] In another editorial published in

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[43] Angela Leung, "The Evolution of the Idea of *Chuanran* Contagion in Imperial China," in *Health and Hygiene in Chinese East Asia: Policies and Publics in the Long Twentieth Century*, eds. Angela Leung and Charlotte Furth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 41.

[44] Benedict, *Bubonic Plague*, 125. Clearly, the Chinese did have anxiety towards the possible pollution by a corpse. The *hanba* expelling grave desecration cases examined in chapter 1 would be a good example of collective anxiety expressed in north China. In southern China, tensions over unburied dead bodies were not unknown. *Shenbao* reported on these matters in March of 1876, introducing the custom in Jiashan county, Zhejiang, where mourners frequently left the body inside the house long after the funeral. The body would frequently become a source of disputes among neighbors, especially when someone in the area suddenly fell ill or died. The neighbors would blame the corpse for the abrupt misfortune and push the family to remove the body, frequently accompanied by insults, assaults, and lawsuits. March 25, 1876, *Shenbao*.

[45] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 148.

[46] July 15, August 3, 1872, *Shenbao*.

1879, a *Shenbao* editorialist argued that , because of the pollution problem, unburied coffins should not remain inside the city. The editorialist cited the example of Ningbo in Zhejiang, a city notoriously crowded with unburied coffins. Here, the environment of "the living and the dead dwelling together" made the living vulnerable to the noxious pollution (*yili* 疫癘) that emanated from corpses. He further compares this to Western countries where the government allows neither dead bodies to be buried above ground nor dead bodies to remain among the living. Furthermore, in European countries like France, old cemeteries inside the city were increasingly relocated to the suburban area, a practice which "should be taken seriously."[47] In the 1890s, when there was a growing concern over an epidemic outbreak in Shanghai, coffins left unburied in public cemeteries were blamed for spreading the pestilential disease. In the summer of 1890, when an epidemic outbreak – likely cholera – struck Shanghai, it was pointed out that coffins remaining above ground were instrumental to the spread of the pestilential disease. In the article of August 27, 1890, the editorialist pointed out that the disease struck numerous Chinese while only 3-4 foreigners were affected. This, according to him, was because "over 1,800 unburied coffins" kept in the cemetery of Siming gongsuo produced the deadly miasma. He urged that these coffins must be buried immediately.[48] In the early summer of 1894, upon the plague outbreak in Hong Kong, *Shenbao* reported on plague prevention measures discussed in the Shanghai Municipal Council. Here, it was decided that the prompt burial of exposed coffins was the most urgent task. The report points out that the death custom of the Chinese was highly problematic. In contrast to the Western practice of encoffining the body within 24 hours after death, the Chinese normally waited 3 days before putting the body in a coffin, during which the

[47] December 3, 1879, *Shenbao*.

[48] August 27, 1890, *Shenbao*.

body could produce foul *qi*. Furthermore, the area that included the eastern suburb of the county seat and the western and southern side of the Huangpu River were filled with public cemeteries, where numerous coffins sat unburied while waiting for the families to retrieve them. The pestilential *qi* (*shiqi*) produced from these coffins, the article stresses, could spread to the foreign settlements and cause epidemics to break out there. Since the Municipal Council did not have jurisdiction outside of the settlements, the article urges, charities must set about burying all the exposed coffins, whether claimed or unclaimed, in order to prevent possible outbreak of pestilential diseases in Shanghai.[49]

However, in spite of the growing recognition of unburied dead bodies as a health hazard, removing these bodies was not an easy matter for both the Chinese and foreigners. Often, forced removal of unburied coffins from the original place of disposal aroused public unrest and popular backlash. *Shenbao* articles indicate several occasions of non-compliance when the removal of unburied coffins was ordered. In the summer of 1879, for instance, the prefect of Ningbo ordered the removal of coffins left exposed on the public road near farms. However, the project made a very slow progress, as "only one or two out of ten" coffins were removed by the family throughout the latter half of the year. In December, the prefect made another order to arrange a new burial ground in an empty field outside of the north gate and build coffin repositories where coffins could stay for three years until being sent to a charitable cemetery for burial. This measure was conceivably a response to the troubles caused by "numerous scoundrels" against the forced clearing up of old disposal ground; thus, the refusal on the part of the family to

[49] June 9, 1894, *Shenbao*.

relocate coffins presumably pushed the prefect to arrange an alternative space for temporary disposal.[50]

As several of the above examples indicate, problematizing the places for the dead took place as a distinct form of colonial encroachment. Graves, cemeteries, and coffin homes scattered around the foreign residential area were perceived as a hindrance to making the city an inhabitable environment. Accordingly, the European imperial powers that came to China increasingly demanded the removal of existing graveyards and cemeteries where they could instead build houses, lay roads, and implement other forms of urban development. This was not just the case of Shanghai but happened in several locations where foreigners came in and settled. Examining several disputes with foreigners over the removal of tombs and cemeteries throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, Song-Chuan Chen went on to argue that "in late Qing China's interaction with the West, death practices became a significant political force," and thus "death-related religious practices were transformed from domestic sociopolitical issues into a potent source of conflict in China's foreign relations."[51] The most well-known case by far is the so-called cemetery riots of Siming gongsuo in Shanghai in 1874 and 1898, sparked by French attempts to appropriate Siming gongsuo's cemetery sites.

The disputed sites were located outside of the walled city on the northwestern bank of the city moat. In 1849, these sites were incorporated within the area set aside for the French Concession. Throughout the 1860s, the guild's claim to the property was gradually challenged, as the French authorities constantly made efforts to appropriate the guild property on the grounds of developing the district. Prior to the riot of 1874, the French planned to "run two roads past the

[50] December 23, December 29, 1879, *Shenbao*.

[51] Chen, "The Power of Ancestors," 115-116.

sides of the guild property, intersecting in one of the cemeteries."[52] The riot broke out while the guild managers were reaching out to the French authorities for negotiation. In the case of the 1898 riot, the French problematized the guild coffin homes where, by 1898, over 3,000 coffins were awaiting transport home.[53] The conflict began as the French authorities called for the removal of the stored coffins and old graves in order to get rid of the potential source of disease.[54] In January of 1898, the French decided to annex the entire guild cemetery (the western quarter) in order to build a school, a hospital, and an abattoir, and gave the guild notice to vacate the premises. This news agitated guild members, and violence broke out in July when the French began to demolish the wall surrounding the guild cemetery.[55]

While the cemetery riots of Siming gongsuo are normally interpreted as anti-foreign resistance, it is important to recognize that the Chinese who opposed the removal of the cemeteries developed an argument about a distinct value of these sites.

Legally speaking, the Chinese were not supposed to own land in settlement areas. [56] However, the transaction of the land that included graves and cemeteries was treated delicately,

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[52] Goodman, *Native Place*, 160.

[53] RD Belsky, "Bones of Contention: The Siming Gongsuo Riots of 1874 and 1898," in *Papers on Chinese History*, eds. Richard Belsky et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1992), 63.

[54] The Municipal Council in fact had an issue with the Siming coffin homes for quite a while. In 1885, the acting Shanghai consul-general complained about the growing number of coffins at the guild, which was followed by no response. In the summer of 1890, when Shanghai was suffering from unusual number of cholera outbreak, the Municipal Council had the coffin homes inspected by the municipal doctor and engineer. There were over 1,000 coffins in the facility at the time, but they concluded that the coffins represented no health threat to the community. Belsky, "Bones of Contention," 63-64.

[55] Belsky, "Bones of Contention," 58-65.

[56] While this was the rule, it was often overlooked. Westel Willoughby provides the following account: "In the Concessions Chinese are not supposed to hold lands. In fact, however, they do so by borrowing (usually for a financial consideration) the names of foreigners. This practice also exists in the International Settlement at Shanghai. [Certain foreign lawyers and other individuals in Shanghai conduct a profitable business by charging Chinese a fee of twenty-five dollars for registering their lands in foreigners' names.] There, however, a great deal of land is held directly by the Chinese, the original titles

subject to a separate set of regulations. Article 3 of Land Regulations – the constitution of the International Settlements created in 1845 – states that "If there are graves or coffins on the land rented, their removal must be a matter of separate agreement, it being contrary to the custom of the Chinese to include them in the agreement of deed of sale." Article 16 further determines that "within the said limits, lands may be set apart for Foreign Cemeteries. In no case shall the graves of Chinese on land rented by foreigners be removed, without the express sanction of the families to whom they belong, who also, so long as they remain unmoved, must be allowed every family to visit and sweep them at the established period, but no coffins of Chinese must hereafter be placed within the said limits, or be left above ground."[57] In other words, foreigners who wished to remove graves or cemeteries were required to negotiate with the owner or the family, which normally held the buyer responsible for financial compensation for the relocation of the body.

Western attempts to remove graves did not always cause trouble. According to Henriot, "the removal of the individual tombs was negotiated with the owner if the family was still around; it rarely created a problem. As for cemeteries, however, their removal or transformation was more delicate."[58] Meanwhile, Chen observed that, while tomb-related disputes frequently stirred up "collective emotions (anguish, sadness, hatred and shame)," this did not necessarily lead to a homogenous response on the part of the Chinese. Rather, "the government and local community were not averse to compromise [with foreigners' demand for land sale] when it served local interests and suited government policy towards foreign powers."[59] Clearly, the

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never having been transferred to foreign ownership." Westel W. Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1920), 210.

[57] *Land Regulations and Bye-Laws for the Foreign Settlement of Shanghai, North of the Yang-King-Pang* (Shanghai: The North China Herald Office, 1907), 1, 6. For the drawing up of the regulations, see Chen, "The Power of Ancestors," 121-122.

[58] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 217.

[59] Chen, The Power of Ancestors," 120.

Chinese response to the sale of tomb land and cemeteries was far from homogenous; rather, it was highly contingent depending upon the context within which the dispute was generated. Often, as Chen observes, government mediation of the dispute played a crucial role in preventing the tension from developing into nationwide anti-foreign movements or rebellion against the Qing state.[60]

Therefore, the cases of open conflict that involved lawsuits and news coverage might have only been rare examples when the tension was greatly politicized. From these occasions, however, we get to see how the Chinese defined the meaning of the collective space for the dead in terms of their vision of urban life. These people asserted that the space for the dead – either coffin homes or cemeteries – was public property (*gongchan* 公產), that is, space that exclusively belong to the deceased deposited on the land and was therefore inviolable. This argument implies that the deceased deserved a postmortem home; since the home was not given by the family, it must be arranged through public resources. Just as an individual grave cannot be disturbed without the consent of the rightful owner or caretaker – which means the family – the collective resting place of the homeless dead must not be disturbed without proper negotiations with the rightful caretaker – that is, the charity and the guild that was responsible for the management of the cemetery or the coffin home.

This argument appeared in the resistance of Siming gongsuo against the attempted appropriation of guild cemetery sites by the French. The Siming gongsuo had to deal with the claim of the French authorities that they were technically not the rightful owner of the cemetery site; rather, they owned the cemetery "by tolerance only. The land was once registered in the name of M. Victor Edan, and during his nominal ownership the streets were marked out. He

[60] Chen, "The Power of Ancestors," 139.

subsequently gave it up, and *the guild have been allowed* to remain in possession."[61] (emphasis mine) The French argument, therefore, was that there was no legal ground with which Siming gongsuo could refuse to sell the land because it did not really own the land in the first place. Against this argument, however, Siming gongsuo and those who allied with the guild asserted a different viewpoint on the land. In 1874, in a letter to the French consul defending the grievances of Siming gongsuo, the Shanghai *daotai* claimed that "the cemetery is the public property of gentry, merchants, scholars, and people of every county in Ningbo" that had long served as the resting place of innumerable dead bodies.[62] In other words, the cemetery was a historic site storing the remains of the Ningbo people and therefore preserving the collective identity of the community. Interestingly, the guild claimed this by stressing how its cemetery was different from other public cemeteries run by publicly oriented charities without any regional or occupational affiliation, such as Tongren fuyuantang. In the petition delivered to the French consul on December 26, 1873, the guild argued that removing the guild cemetery was fundamentally different from removing the cemetery of Tongren fuyuantang, for the bodies buried in the latter were "unidentified people who died on the street, without anyone who would claim them, who came from every province [and not from the same native place] whose native place (*ben*) is unknown." In contrast, the bodies buried in the guild cemetery were:

> the people of Siming. Although they are not families, they are friends. Some of them have descendants who would come to bring the body back later. There are so many coffins that have long been buried in the cemetery, some of which are already decomposed. If these are all scattered and removed, no one would be able to find [which one is where], and when the family come to claim the dead, how could we return the dead to the family?[63]

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[61] June 27, 1874, *North China Herald*.

[62] *Shanghai Siming gongsuo shiliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi chubanshe, 2011), 268.

[63] *Shanghai Siming gongsuo shiliao,* 262.

In other words, unlike those in Tongren fuyuantang's cemetery, the bodies buried in the guild cemetery were not the homeless dead. They still had attachment to the family built and maintained through Siming gongsuo's death services, and it was the guild's responsibility to protect the bodies until the family finally comes to collect them. Through the cemetery and the bodies deposited in it, the guild is connected to the larger community in the native place. Thus, the argument of public property is clearly ingrained in the notion of shared native-place ties, in which the guild serves not only the dead but also the living of Ningbo. The guild cemetery, a distinct kind of property for the deceased members where the cultural and historical memories of the whole community were embedded, served the collective interest of all guild members, both living and dead.

Considering that the beneficiaries of Siming gongsuo's death service were highly circumscribed, the term public may not seem to properly describe the nature of the cemetery. One may argue that the cemetery would be better understood as a "private" property, for the site belonged to a private guild – that is, a non-state institution constituted of a specific group of people – and serving the private interest of the guild, rather than the general public of Shanghai. Why then was the cemetery for Ningbo migrants in Shanghai called public property and what was the implication of this term?

One of the answers could be found from the meaning of public – *gong*, in Chinese. William Rowe explains that, by the mid eighteenth century, *gong* was used in a wide range of contexts that involve collective, communal matters.[64] Implicit in this use of the term was that

[64] The meaning of *gong* here was often very ambiguous and even conflicting because it could be used referring "ether to areas of strictly bureaucratic concern or to areas of extra-bureaucratic community interest." In other words, *gong* was used for both governmental and non-governmental matters. An example for the former would be *gongwen* 公文 (meaning state documents), while that for the latter

gong meant something opposite to *si*, i.e., private or selfish. Joseph Fewsmith elaborates that *gong* denoted public-mindedness (as opposed to selfish-ness), the quality established "based on Confucian precepts, and in a well-ordered society, would be embodied in the state, and especially in the monarchy."[65] In other words, *gong*, whether used to denote governmental action or refer to non-governmental collective quality, must be something righteous or morally upright. In this light, the public-ness of the collective cemetery comes from the assumption that the space was a righteous place that served the need of the deceased and further benefited the whole community. Therefore, even though the guild cemetery was only opened to a limited range of people, the space was still "public" because it was used to protect the deceased who otherwise had no place to rest.

This understanding of the value of the cemetery shaped the way the constituents of Danyang gongsuo responded to the removal of the communal cemetery. Danyang gongsuo was a native-place organization for migrants who hailed from Zhenjiang prefecture in Jiangsu. Established in the Xianfeng era by a philanthropist from Danyang surnamed Wang, the cemetery was about one-*mu* large and was located in the International Settlement. In 1897, a group of members of the guild sued Yang Zhishan, then the manager of the guild, for selling the cemetery to a foreigner. Upon interrogation, Yang testified that, by 1897, the cemetery was packed and no more burial was feasible. Besides, the site was located in the middle of a foreign residential area, which made it hard for people to access the cemetery. Furthermore, the residents in the neighborhood complained about the pollution caused by the coffins deposited in the cemetery and pushed Yang to sell the land. Therefore, Yang decided to sell the cemetery to foreigners and

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would include *gonglun* 公論 (public opinion). William Rowe, "The Public Sphere in Modern China," *Modern China* 16 (1990): 318.

[65] Fewsmith, "From Guild to Interest Group," 618.

move the bodies to a new cemetery in a much larger site – about 10 *mu* large – he purchased outside of the west gate. The guild members who accused Yang claimed that he was not entitled to make this decision because "the cemetery is a public property of the guild," that is, "it is a property [of the people from] four counties in Zhenjiang prefecture." In their argument, Yang's decision to sell the land was an abuse of power for the sake of his own profit. In particular, the opponents of the land sale problematized Yang's managerial position. Yang came to the position of manager following his father who had been a manager of the guild. After the father passed away, Yang took over the job. The opponents denied the legitimacy of this claim by saying that "the position of manager is not inheritable [from father to son]; Yang, being a local person (*bendiren* 本地人, probably meaning that he was born and raised in Shanghai), how come he intervenes in the management of guild affairs!" In other words, Yang was disqualified from serving as a manager of the guild, and therefore, his decision to sell the cemetery should be revoked. Thus, here, the public nature of the cemetery was deployed against an outsider who illicitly occupied the position of manager. It may have been a shaky argument on their part, for Yang was the son of a Zhenjiang migrant who naturally inherited the managerial position from his father.[66] The main point of the argument was likely that Yang did not deserve such a position because his selfishness damaged the collective interests of the Danyang people.

Unlike the Siming gongsuo incident that would happen a year later, this incident did not lead to a serious conflict, conceivably thanks to the involvement of the government. The Chinese magistrate swiftly closed the case, publicly condemning the injustice done to the dead. Yang Zhishan was sentenced to punishment and the new cemetery site Yang purchased outside of the west gate was given to the guild as a compensation. Furthermore, the court granted lavish seven-

[66] According to Rubie Watson, it was common in early twentieth-century Hong Kong that the managerial position of corporate property was inherited from father to son. Watson, "Corporate Property," 247.

day rituals of offering at the new cemetery site while renovating the old cemetery with a "permanent ban" against appropriating the site for other purpose. Therefore, clearly aware of the political sensitivity of such case, the magistrate likely closed the case by affirming the value of the dead's space defined by the members of the guild community.[67]

A few years later, a similar dispute erupted among members of the hot water shops guild. The guild was composed of about 200 members who hailed from "the north and south of the Yangtze." During the Xianfeng reign, the guild established a five-*mu* large cemetery at Sanjiayuan, which was used as "a vault for depositing coffins, together with a free burial ground." According to a report from *North China Herald*, in 1901, the site was sold to a US firm, Messers. Atkinson & Dallas jointly by "certain members of the guild (Chuan Ziyuan at el., according to the *Shenbao* report of August 12), Tongren fuyuantang, and others."[68] This arrangement, however, was soon canceled as Xu Shunqing and others sued them before the Shanghai magistrate. The Shanghai magistrate ordered to "return to that firm the sum of $500, the price paid for the land." Furthermore, "the land was then secured forever from purchase." Lastly, additional measures were taken in compliance with the Municipal Council rule of public health management, establishing walls surrounding the burial ground and removing exposed coffins from the premises in order to eliminate "offensive odor." In 1907, however, the site came into conflict once again, as the Chiu Hsing Co., in an attempt to expand its commercial activities in the area, proposed to extend the road that passes directly through the cemetery site. On August 1, the *daotai* sent a letter to the Municipal Council explaining why this plan must be repealed.

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[67] November 4, 1897*,* May 22, 1898, June 2, 1899, September 1, 1898, *Shenbao*.

[68] It was a prominent US firm of civil engineers and architects in Shanghai founded in 1898. See Arnold Wright*, Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong-Kong, Shanghai, and Other Treaty Ports of China: Their History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Company, Ltd., 1908), 628-630.

The *daotai* first and foremost emphasized that "the graves are numerous and there is not an inch of ground free; their ancestors have remained there undisturbed for a long space of time." Furthermore, the *daotai* invoked the agreement of non-encroachment made in the previous dispute, whereby "it is on record that no portion of the land may be given away and this rule cannot be changed." Finally, the *daotai* asserted that the site was a public property of the guild, saying:

> The cemetery is the common property of all the members of the Guild to the number of over 200 and it is difficult, therefore, to know who is to receive the price and deliver proofs of purchase.[69]

In other words, the land belongs to all the members – both living and dead – and, because of this collective nature of the land, the normal procedure of land transaction was not applicable.

In spite of this argument, however, the Municipal Council replied with a remark that the "acquisition of the land [was] necessary for the proper development of the district" and therefore "unreasoning opposition of the part of the guild" must be withdrawn. In the end, the cemetery was cleared in the summer of 1908, causing continuous backlash from the Chinese. However, this event did not result in violent conflicts as did the Siming gongsuo case. *Shenbao* reports throughout the summer and fall of 1908 continued to report the continuing investigation of the suspects who were responsible for illicitly selling the land.[70]

In the above cases, the constituents of "the public" that had an interest in the cemetery are relatively clear: the members who had affiliation to the guild by paying membership fee and regular donations. Managers were the people entrusted to "manage" those resources on behalf of the members. Therefore, removing the cemetery likely meant more than the simple relocation of

[69] October 25, 1907, *North China Herald*.

[70] October 4, October 25, 1907, *North China Herald*.

the physical site; it influenced guild solidarity built on the promise of taking care of the dead. In this light, the notion of public property could be understood as the collective efforts to ensure the postmortem welfare of the guild members.

The notion of the collective place for the dead as a public property, however, was not an exclusive argument for guilds. The cemeteries managed by Tongren fuyuantang, where mostly "homeless and unidentified" dead were interred, were also subject to a series of disputes and controversies over land sales.[71] One of these occasions was in 1902, when the Municipal Council proposed to purchase one of Tongren fuyuantang's cemeteries to build a Chinese public school. According to reports from *The North China Herald*, the decision of the Municipal Council to build a public school (a "lecture hall for the Chinese use") was made around 1900. In the spring of 1902, the Municipal Council negotiated with the "trustees" of Tongren fuyuantang to purchase a 24-*mu* cemetery site. The committee of Tongren fuyuantang agreed to sell the cemetery land at 53,500 taels.[72] However, this decision soon met with fierce resistance. On July 21, *Shenbao* reported under the headline "On the Secret Sale of a Charitable Cemetery" (*daomai yizhong shi* 盜賣義塚事) that Cao Jishan, the manager of Tongren fuyuantang, had secretly sold the cemetery land located in the lot of Bao'antang, a charity located in the International Settlement, for an agreed price of 30,000 *liang*. Managers of Bao'antang, Qu Kaitong and Lu Songhou at el., filed a petition to the Chinese magistrate. Cao Jishan testified in the court that "since Bao'antang's cemetery was separated out of Tongren fuyuantang's cemetery, it is the property (*chan* 產) of Tongeren fuyuantang." It appears that the cemetery originally belonged to Tongren

[71] Henriot, *Scythe and the City*, 218-222.

[72] According to a letter under the name of Zhao (Cao?) Jisui on March 19th, 1902, the original price was 73,500 taels. Out of this amount, Tongren fuyuantang proposed to donate 20,000 taels while using the remaining 3,500 taels to remove coffins. Apr 2, October 29, 1902, *North China Herald*.

fuyuantang and was later transferred to Bao'antang, though I could not find any documentation about the land contract. Cao further claimed that he decided to sell the cemetery in order to fund the charitable works of Tongren fuyuantang. However, public opinion became agitated to the point that, on July 21, "elite managers from several migrant groups" had a gathering to discuss the malfeasance of Cao. According to a *Shenbao* report, over a hundred people participated in the gathering to condemn the "seven crimes" Cao committed. The indictment raised in the gathering mostly blamed Cao for abusing his power as a manager to make an arbitrary decision against the collective interest he was supposed to serve. His decision was inappropriate particularly because he did not consult with the managers of Bao'antang even though Bao'antang was the primary managing body of the cemetery. Furthermore, it was alleged, the land sale was extremely disturbing and illegitimate given the recent efforts of public burial providers – presumably Siming gongsuo – to protect cemeteries from the foreigners' plot to occupy the Chinese land. By handing over the cemetery to foreigners, Cao Jishan went against what other public actors were striving to protect. In sum, he violated the principle that "public property and public money should [be determined by] collective discussions. It is a matter for the entire city, not just one person." (*Gongchan gongkuan junxu huiyi gai heyizhi shi fei yirenzhi shi ye* 公產公款均須會議該合議之事非一人之事也) Thus, here, the rhetoric of public property was used to condemn the inappropriate decision-making by an individual who was responsible for the collective welfare of the people of the entire city community. What is distinct about this case is that the land sale provoked a fierce response from the cohort of elite mangers based in the city. In their indictment, Cao's decision was invalid because he "did not report [the land sale] to the

yamen or consult with the gentry" (*shenshi* 紳士, meaning the elite managers involved in public management; and this word was replaced by *zhong* 眾, "the mass," in the later report).[73]

Therefore, here, the illegitimacy of the land sale hinged on the assertion that it was a despotic decision that could further invite Western encroachment onto Chinese soil. Thus, the argument of public property here appears to be more wary of the political implication of the land sale. Given the dire consequence of the second cemetery riot of Siming gongsuo (letting the French enlarge the settlement), the public actors in Shanghai at the time were likely very sensitive to the issue of territorial encroachment. In other words, the people involved in the above case presumably understood the cemetery sale as a sign of imperial territorial encroachment. Thus, the rhetoric of a public property here was likely a strategic choice that called attention to the territorial competition with foreigners.

Evidently, the boundary of the "public" was hardly clear. Unlike guild coffin homes and cemeteries, anybody could be buried in Tongren fuyuantang's cemetery, and there was no shared identity among the beneficiaries based on native place, occupation, etc. Moreover, unlike guild services for the dead, having the deceased buried in Tongren fuyuantang's cemetery did not require the family to make financial investments or contributions. Nevertheless, the above case reveals that the lack of a clear boundary in terms of membership or constituents did not prevent people from envisioning the cemetery as a public property. In this argument, the cemetery was a public site with a different nature. As seen in the previous chapter, charitable burials by Tongrentang were carried out relying on donations and contribution from diverse merchant and business circles of the city. Thus, when people were calling the cemetery a "public property," it likely meant that the cemetery was a site that was arranged and maintained by the communal

[73] July 21, July 22, July 23, September 1, 1902, *Shenbao*.

efforts of the urban people, historically serving the collective urban welfare. In other words, it was part of the urban public welfare mechanism that had been working throughout the nineteenth century, which could not be destroyed by an individual's decision.

In the end, the land sale was called off; instead, in August, three elite managers and Lu Songhou, the manager of Bao'antang, raised about 20,000 *liang* 兩 of funds to purchase 10-*mu* large land immediately adjacent to the cemetery as an alterative site for building the public school. The deal was made with a promise that the cemetery property "will be held inviolate as a cemetery forever, or that, should it at any future time be decided to sell the site for other purposes, the Council shall have the first right to purchase it upon identical terms with those agreed upon recently between the Committee and the Council."[74]

The last case concerns a similar dispute over a collective burial ground in Baoshan county (a rural area located in the north of Shanghai that was included in the International Settlement) where coffins were temporarily stored. Unlike the above case, here, the cemetery was not even managed by a corporate charitable group but was a public site collectively used by villagers. The cemetery was located in the International Settlement on the plot registered in the United States Consulate adjacent to the property owned by Barchet, the former vice-consul of the United States. Barchet purchased the land in 1900 and built a house on it. The seed of the trouble was that the land had been used as the site of disposing coffins by villagers, which constantly bothered Barchet. Barchet stated that "[when he bought the land] there were graves behind and … [the Chinese villagers] put coffins near the rear of the house on the west side." Barchet made a request to the Baoshan magistrate to enclose the site, so that people won't be bringing any more coffins. The magistrate was "perfectly willing." Villages, however, made holes in the fence

[74] Oct 29, 1902, *North China Herald*.

and continued to bring and place the coffins on the site. Barchet went on to ask the magistrate to settle the matter, suggesting that he was willing to arrange another piece of land where people could dispose of coffins and pay for the expenses of removing the coffins from the site. Upon the magistrate's permission, Barchet arranged the alternative site somewhere else and purchased some 300 coffins. When he was just about to finish the relocation of coffins out of his backyard, however, the magistrate suddenly told him to stop the work, saying that "he (the magistrate) had not been properly informed about the previous history of the case so he would cancel his permit." Barchet assumed that the magistrate was "afraid of some headmen of the villages who threatened to make it hot for him unless he did what they wanted, and that was to make a squeeze of this land." This matter was further discussed by the *daotai* and the American consul, after which it was suggested to Barchet that he makes arrangements with the magistrate for a settlement. Meanwhile, two "head men" (*dongshi* in Chinese) approached Barchet and proposed to buy the land at 8,000 taels. Barchet refused to comply with this proposal. Then, on a Sunday morning, about a hundred agitated villagers marched onto Barchet's land, took off the coffins placed on the spot and dug trenches and placed the coffins in them. They further destroyed trees and vegetables in the garden.[75]

This incident was an expression of sustained resistance to the removal of a space that had long been used as a temporary disposal site for the villagers. In arguing their claim over the site, Barchet and the villagers drew on different sources of legitimacy. Barchet argued that he had purchased the land and thus had a rightful claim on it. He went on to ask the magistrate to measure the land "to make it plain that [he did] not own on inch more land than [he] bought."

[75] June 20, 1908, *North China Herald*; May 3, June 18, June 19, 1908, *Shenbao*.

Meanwhile, the villagers argued that the land was a public property, something that could not be sold:

> The villagers maintained that the plot of land…is not the property of a single village but is shared by upwards of ninety hamlets in Paoshan district (that is, Baoshan county). It is used for the burial of destitute strangers, and although numerous offers have been made for it by Dr. Barchet, a majority of the villages concerned steadily refused to part with the land. The Paoshan Magistrate, say these countrymen, cannot give a title deed for the property when all these villages have deeds for it, and they do not recognize his right to order them to part with it at all …[76]

An interesting point here is that, according to the above statement, even the magistrate cannot force the sale of the land arbitrarily; the magistrate's decision to enclose the site upon Barchet's request must be canceled because this decision had been made without the consent of the people who had been using this site. In other words, in the view of the protestors, this site was not a random place without any owner. Here, the question of ownership is interesting. It does not seem that the land had been registered as a charitable grave or land. Furthermore, since the land was registered in the US consulate, the Chinese were not supposed to own the land. However, the above statement argues that the land belonged to the people of Baoshan because they collectively possessed the land deeds. It is not certain whether this argument was factual; the subsequent news reports did not follow up with this point, and the magistrate does not seem to have asked the villagers to hand in the land deeds as evidence of their claim. Then, the best guess is that the site had been used – probably for a long time – as a communal site of disposing of unclaimed dead bodies based on customary agreement among villagers.[77] It is uncertain whether this

[76] June 20, 1908, *North China Herald.*

[77] I hypothesize that the site may fall into "ascriptive village associations" discussed by Prasenjit Duara. In Duara's work, it refers to a type of religious organization that existed in rural north China in the early twentieth century. In this type of organization, "every village member possessed a right to participate" in religious ceremonies. In other words, by virtue of being a villager, every village member automatically

agreement was officially recognized by the Baoshan magistrate, but possibly the magistrate called off his approval of enclosing the site upon realizing that the villagers' claim to the site had a certain legitimacy. Therefore, what these protestors asserted was that arranging and maintaining a site of disposing dead bodies was a public affair, and that villagers were entitled to participate in this issue because they had been attached to the site through dead bodies disposed on the site.

Although these villagers were not bound by any guild-like organization, they significantly claimed a similar sense of attachment to the cemetery site. Losing the site may have caused financial loss, but I think the more important issue here is that these villagers asserted their own way of making sense of the village space vis-à-vis the place for the dead. Possibly, they chose the site for a *fengshui* reason; or, the long usage of the site for "destitute strangers" made it the only acceptable place for these unwanted bodies; maybe villagers were afraid of the consequence of removing these bodies by the hands of a foreigner without proper ritual offerings. In their logic, the community needed a collective space for the dead – even if it was not their final resting place – that could preserve the remains of those who used to be part of the community. Once certain place was designated as the collective space for the dead – whatever the reason was – relocating those remains to another site was not a light matter. In a sense, the villagers' claim to ownership of the site reveals a sense of responsibility to take care of the dead disposed of on that site, even if they were *wuzhuzhe*.

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was a part of the organization. This type of organization was normally responsible for worshipping local tutelary deities, such as the early god or the city god. The ceremony was financed by collective contribution of villagers (levying a flat rate on each household), and some of the temples owned a property collectively bought by villagers. For instance, in a small village called Wu's Shop, the temples dedicated to Guandi and Wudao owned about six mu of property bought by villagers, and the purchase deed of this property cited the village collectively as the owner, i.e., "*Wudiancun cundajia gonggong*," meaning "the public property of everyone in the village of Wu's Shop." Perhaps, in the above case, the argument of all the villages have title deeds for the site may refer to this kind of collective ownership. Duara*, Culture, Power, and the State*, 124-128.

To conclude, the term "public property" implied an attachment in more than a financial sense. It denotes how much people embraced the collective space for the dead as an integral part of city life. For those who fiercely resisted the removal of these places, the dead's land had a very distinct property value, which was not simply a monetary value. Of course, people did invest resources to build and maintain those spaces, but that evidenced their commitment to bringing good afterlife to the former members of the community. Those who were "wrongfully" driven out of their temporary resting place had to be consoled through sacrificial rituals; on top of that, they deserved these spaces where they could rest – even if only temporarily – chosen by the ancestor, cohort, and posterity. Thus, the public value of these spaces hinged on the fact that these spaces were the product of civic activism dedicated to the welfare of the community members and of the city. The term public property connoted this emotional and historical attachment to the dead's space that had existed in the vicinity of the living's community.

V. Conclusion: Rethinking the Dead's Home

The politics of dead bodies in late nineteenth-century Shanghai examined in this chapter illustrates the changing nature of the city itself. The urbanization of Shanghai – as in other Chinese cities – in this period took a distinctly hybrid path that embraced both an existing social structure and new foreign models. Guilds and charities played an essential role moderating the two traditions in a way that the city evolved into a global metropolis. The strength of these public organizations, according to William Rowe, who has done an exhaustive research on the urbanization of Hankou, was the basis of the remarkable stability of the Chinese city at the dawn of the modern era.[78] In Shanghai, guilds and charities were integral to the emergence of such

[78] Rowe, *Hankow*.

"modern" municipal institutions as the Chamber of Commerce and the City Council during the first decade of the twentieth century.[79] Arranging proper burial for the residents of the city was one of the crucial features that made these institutions major public actors.

The collective space for the dead, divided into numerous layers of groups and subgroups following the lines of nationality, ethnicity, and institutional affiliations, became a regular part of urban dwelling. The residents, mostly migrant workers who came to the city in pursuit of new economic opportunities opened up by European trade, had to rely on the strength of the institution to which they were affiliated in order to ensure the safety and welfare in the afterlife. For most of them, going back to their home town and finding a resting place there would have been merely a wishful thought; rather, their prospect of their own future would have been shaped by a realistic assumption that they had to linger on in Shanghai for a while after death. Public facilities such as communal cemeteries and coffin homes were the social welfare system indispensable for these urbanites, most of whom did not have a prospect of having what was conventionally thought of as proper burial.

In chapter 3, I claimed that the imperial ideology of proper burial materialized in the form of public death management in Jiangnan in the early nineteenth century. The expansion of public facilities for the dead in late nineteenth-century Shanghai further reveals how the notion of proper burial evolved, adjusting to the new context of colonialization, modernization, and urbanization. For one thing, the public facilities and cemeteries in Shanghai were a bit different from the proper home for the dead envisioned in the imperial and intellectual discourse discussed in chapter 2. Here, the gist of the proper home was earth burial, in line with the Confucian

[79] Mark Elvin, "The Administration of Shanghai, 1905-1914," in *The Chinese Cities Between Two Worlds*, eds. Mark Elvin and William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 239-262; Goodman, *Native Place*, 176-216.

principle of ritual propriety, which would lay the basis for the proper performance of ancestor worship. In other words, the proper home of the dead was envisioned in light of restoring proper familial ethics. This commitment to familial solidarity, to a certain degree, did shape the way public cemeteries were arranged. As discussed in chapter 3, several public cemeteries strove to arrange separate spaces for *youzhuzhe* and *wuzhuzhe*, meaning that public burial did care about helping the deceased (*youzhuzhe*) maintain a family tie. However, seen through the disputes discussed in this chapter, in late nineteenth-century Shanghai, people projected a somewhat different value on public cemeteries. In particular, in calling public cemeteries a public property, we can see that the reciprocity between the living and the dead was built on a communal sense of responsibility rather than on the ethics of the individual family. Here, *youzhuzhe* and *wuzhuzhe* seem more like concepts than factual descriptions of the deceased, because guilds and charities were virtually acting as an alternative caretaker on behalf of the family, blurring the distinction between the two.

Therefore, the public sense of responsibility, as an emblem of civic activism dedicated to the management of community matters, redefined the notion of proper burial in an environment where familial solidarity was rapidly deteriorating. Although public cemeteries and coffin homes may not have really contributed to sustaining a familial solidarity and maintaining the orthodox form of ancestor worship – as the imperial state had envisioned in the eighteenth century – these spaces became an alternative mode of maintaining the harmony between the living and the dead. The public spaces for the dead in late nineteenth-century Shanghai reveal how the efforts of guarding the dead's home modified the orthodox concept of proper burial in a way that fit the changing demographic and socioeconomic reality of the late nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

By shedding light on unburied dead bodies, this dissertation has highlighted the social history of death that revolved around the issue of burial in Qing China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This dissertation has situated discourse and practices pertaining to the burial of dead bodies within the broader contexts of population crisis and early modern governance. It has observed how society, state, and civic groups changed their attitudes and practices in response to the social problems emblematic in unburied dead bodies: the increase of illicit social customs in local society, the deterioration of family ideology, and the growing inability of the Qing state to control people's mind and behavior.

My chief observation is that death and burial were far from a monolithic issue of filial piety or ancestor worship. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, people increasingly had to contact dead bodies in everyday life. Qing zombie narratives provide a fascinating channel through which we can learn how people felt about having to see, touch, and be near corpses of strangers. This context expanded the parameter of interaction between the living and the dead that no longer revolved around within the family relationship. Public death management emerged in part addressing this new perception and experience of death that required adjustment of the "traditional" family-based approach to death and burial.

Another important observation is the way in which various Qing constituents sought remedies for this issue. Here, I have stressed the role of state-society partnership in spreading the ideology of proper burial through the expansion of public cemeteries. The Qing state, on its part, responded to the perceived problem of unburied dead bodies by ideologizing the bodily sanctity

of the dead. From the beginning of the Qing, the ethical responsibility of giving a proper home to the dead was part of the imperial ideology. The problem was how to apply this ideological precept in real life. The eighteenth-century government actively sought to rectify popular burial customs by criminalizing practices that were deemed inappropriate. This state activism was accompanied by civic movements at the local level that sponsored the establishment and expansion of public cemeteries. Therefore, the notion of proper burial was a distinct early modern death ethics that emerged as a neo-Confucian dogma of social reform and became popularized through public activism in Jiangnan.

The gist of this state-society partnership was the assumption that changing material conditions of burial would transform people's thoughts and behavior, making more and more people adhere to the proper model of disposing of the dead – that is, burying the dead in earth in a timely manner. Thus, arranging and securing communal burial sites opened to the public was crucial for reforming burial customs. This approach continued to shape public death management in nineteenth-century Jiangnan when the activist state virtually retreated from handling local affairs and public institutions such as charities and guilds took over the task of managing death and burial. The effect was that the ethics of proper burial standardized and came to shape general expectations about a good way of death, which must dictate the afterlife of the majority of community members, both *youzhuzhe* and *wuzhuzhe*. In other words, certain death ethics standardized while seeking to provide proper burial to a presumably marginalized group of dead people.

The public initiative of death management in Jiangnan during the nineteenth century further testifies to the fact that civic groups played a crucial role in materializing the ideology of proper burial, albeit with considerable adjustment in the actual format and process of carrying

out proper burial. In burying unburied dead bodies, civic actors made essential innovations in the method of resource mobilization through which they could extend death ethics to the vast number of *wuzhuzhe*. It included the system of regular donation and subscription, regular inspection and collection of dead bodies, mobilization of labor force, and expansion and protection of landed properties reserved for the burial of unclaimed dead bodies. Ultimately, this public sense of responsibility developed to the point where, as seen in the case of Shanghai, the public management of death and burial became a norm that dictated the way urban communities evolved under new contexts of colonialism and urbanization. A series of movements to protect public cemeteries and coffin storage facilities was more than a newly emerging pattern of politicizing death against imperial powers; it was an outgrowth of death ethics that administrators, urban leaders, and residents of the city had long cultivated while striving to administer the city and improve the living environment.

The evolution of death services during the latter half of the nineteenth century in Shanghai further reveals the extent to which public activism revised the ideology of proper burial. If the gist of the ideology of proper burial was to revive the family ethics by promoting the correct ritual practice, public death services in Shanghai did not necessarily conform to the ideological precept. For instance, coffin homes run by guilds provided a high-quality facility that could legitimately delay interment of the dead, virtually perpetuating the practice of delayed burial. This, however, was not taken as an improper treatment of the dead, as least by Chinese administrators. Rather, several groups of Chinese constituents in Shanghai perceived this system as an indispensable social welfare infrastructure in the rapidly expanding urban environment, for coffin homes protected dead bodies for the purpose of their eventual proper burial at home. Furthermore, the legitimacy of these spaces and of public cemeteries lied in the fact that these

were public properties: these were not family properties that served an exclusive interest of individual families, but the properties mobilized following the public needs that could fulfill a righteous purpose of providing a resting place to urban residents. Thus, these spaces for the dead, firmly rooted in the interests and organizations of an urban community, was instrumental in creating the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead beyond the family's boundary. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, death and burial became matters of public interest, management, and intervention in Jiangnan.

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